



LIBRARY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY
OF ILLINOIS

823

K21d

v.1

3 vols

7/6

260 469

Beatrice
Ann 8th

In Memory of the Author.

1879

A DOUBTING HEART.



A DOUBTING HEART.

BY

ANNIE KEARY,

AUTHOR OF "CASTLE DALY," "OLDBURY," ETC.

In Three Volumes.

VOL. I.

London :
MACMILLAN AND CO.

1879.

[*All Rights reserved.*]

CHARLES DICKENS AND EVANS,
CRYSTAL PALACE PRESS.

823

K21d

v.1

THIS book was the work of the last year of its Author's life. It is now given to the public exactly as it passed from her hands, except for a few verbal corrections which were left for others to make. One scene only remained incomplete, and this link was supplied at the Author's request by her friend Mrs. Macquoid, to whom my thanks are due for the care and skill with which she has fulfilled her task of love.

E. K.

MARSHALL
SEP 24 50

1950

1950

1950

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

	PAGE
IDLE TEARS	1

CHAPTER II.

THE VALLEY OF HUMILIATION	44
-------------------------------------	----

CHAPTER III.

IDUNA'S GROVE	59
-------------------------	----

CHAPTER IV.

AIR THRONE	84
----------------------	----

CHAPTER V.

A SUDDEN SMILE	106
--------------------------	-----

CHAPTER VI.

	PAGE
PROS AND CONS	139

CHAPTER VII.

A TURNING-POINT	160
---------------------------	-----

CHAPTER VIII.

SPIDERS AND NORNIR'S THREADS	188
--	-----

CHAPTER IX.

FORTUNATUS'S PURSE	222
------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER X.

TWILIGHT	246
--------------------	-----

CHAPTER XI.

HORACE KIRKMAN	261
--------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XII.

ROUND THE FIRE	283
--------------------------	-----

A DOUBTING HEART.

CHAPTER I.

IDLE TEARS.

Tears, idle tears—I know not what they mean.

“WELL, Alma, I really think that at last I have earned a few minutes’ rest.”

The speaker of this sentence was not, as might be supposed, a weary sempstress in an attic, hushing the click of her machine, as it completed the last stitch in her long, long day’s tale of work, or a washerwoman in a cellar wringing the soap-suds from her wrinkled arms, or a governess, whose charges had just been borne off to bed. It was a handsome, matronly lady, in a black velvet dress, who, suiting her action to her words, sank down into a well-cushioned chair by a glowing fire in a London drawing-room. The last visitor had been shown out, the footman had disappeared with the afternoon tea-tray, the doors of the inner drawing-room were shut, and

the curtains drawn across; but there was something beyond even these tokens of quiet, that combined to fill the room just then with a subtle atmosphere of repose. There was a suggestion, though one could not precisely say where it lurked, that this delightful stillness succeeded a commotion of some sort. It might be given by an unusually festive arrangement of the furniture of the room, or by occasional sounds of hurrying feet and clacking tongues that came up from the lower regions. Alma read it most plainly in the radiant self-satisfaction that shone in her mother's face, and seemed to surround her whole person with an aura of congratulation and conscious well-doing. Only for an instant did her lace cap touch the back of her chair, the next, her head was erect again, and her face turned to her daughter with an alert expression on it, which told Alma that the discussion of yesterday's events, that had been going on since morning, and of which she herself was sick at heart, was about to be opened again in some new phase.

"Do you know, my dear Alma," Lady Rivers began, "I really can't yet take in the thought that only yesterday at three o'clock Constance left us—Constance and her husband. Now the excitement is all over, we shall begin to miss the dear child dreadfully. I wonder I don't feel it more, but of course I shall now that all is over."

“I hope not, mamma.”

“But I shall. A mother must feel the loss of her daughter, however satisfactory the cause of the separation may be. Do you know, Alma, I fancied Lady Forest was a little surprised that the leave-taking between myself and Constance passed so quietly. *She* cried when she said ‘Good-bye’ to her son, I observed, but then she is a widow; I am sure I hope she won’t argue, from my self-control, that Constance is not a great loss to me. I hope it won’t give a wrong impression about how that lovely creature is regarded in her own home. I really don’t know how it happened. I am sure my feelings are keen enough; but yesterday morning was such a whirl, and just as the travellers were starting, Preston came to me with a teasing question about the arrangements for the evening. I was obliged to attend to him, or nothing would have been as it should be.”

“Lady Forest is differently circumstanced, you see, mamma; she can afford to have feelings on public occasions, and let things take their course. She is not on promotion as we are.”

“I should be very much grieved if I thought Constance was in any danger of being looked down upon by the people she is going among. I have been doing my very utmost ever since I saw how things were likely

to turn out, to give the Forests the right impression about all our connections. I have given your father all the hints I could, to prevent his making unfortunate allusions, as he does sometimes, and I have gone against my own feelings and run the risk of offending old friends, for the sake of keeping all our entertainments lately, as nearly as possible, to their set. My own feelings would have led me to ask Emmie West to be one of the bridesmaids, but I refrained, from fear of giving theirs the smallest shock."

"I wonder what sort of feelings those are that would be shocked at the sight of Emmie West?"

"Lady Forest is very inquisitive, and might have asked questions. As it was, I think she must have been struck with the fact that the person of most consequence in the room was a friend on our side, quite unconnected with them. I wonder whether your father talked at all to Lord Anstice. I rather thought he would have proposed his health, but he did not. Do you suppose Lord Anstice was satisfied with the amount of attention he received, Alma?"

"I did not ask him, mamma; but I don't suppose he came here to talk to papa, or to have his health drunk either."

"Alma, have you any idea that he came for any other

reason than because he was asked? You will tell me, I am sure, if you have."

"He did not come for the reason that has just shot into your head, dear mother, I assure you, so put it away as quickly as you can. It was all a joke to him. His cousin, whom we do know intimately, and whom we did not ask, saw the invitation we sent to him whom we knew very little, and ordered him to accept it. My clairvoyance does not go farther than that. I can't make up my mind how much good-nature there was in Wynyard Anstice's bestirring himself to secure us the presence of a live earl at our first wedding, or how far it was done in pure scorn. Lord Anstice did as he was bid, and is only disappointed that we are all so like the people he sees every day, that coming to our wedding has given him nothing new to talk about. If we had been vulgar on the surface, so that he could see it, he would have been quite satisfied with his morning's entertainment."

"Really, Alma, I wonder how you can talk in that cold-blooded way. If Wynyard Anstice has been representing us to his cousin as proper subjects for ridicule, I can only say he makes a most unworthy return for all the kindness I showed him in old times, when your brothers used to bring him from school to spend holidays with us. I can't believe such a thing of him, however."

“And you need not, mamma. I am quite as sure as you can be, that Mr. Anstice has never spoken disparagingly of us to anyone, and I sincerely believe he meant to do you a pleasure by sending his cousin here yesterday. Perhaps he thought it would please me too; I don’t know.”

“Then you should not say such misleading things, my dear, making one uncomfortable for nothing.”

“You are right, mamma, I should not.”

The conversation seemed to have come to a standstill, as it was apt to do when Wynyard Anstice’s name got into any talk between the mother and daughter.

Alma, who was much given to tracing effects to their causes, was just beginning to wonder how this name came to be spoken so often—seeing that her own determination, and, as she believed, her mother’s, was to keep it from ever being spoken at all: was it really so much in her secret thoughts, that it forced itself to her tongue without her will’s leave?—when the thread of her self-questioning was broken by the entrance of the servant with the evening letters. A foreign one, addressed to Alma, fixed her mother’s eyes, as well as her own.

“From Constance,” exclaimed Lady Rivers, leaning forward in her chair, the self-satisfaction passing from

her face as a flash of true mother-hunger came for a moment into her eyes.

“Be quick and open it, Alma; there will be something for me inside. What! not a line—well, read—what does the sweet child say? Is she comfortable and happy?”

“There is not much; you had better read it, mamma; it is chiefly directions about sending on her boxes,” said Alma, as she handed a sheet, with a few lines scribbled on it, to her mother.

“And there is nothing more? Alma, are you sure?” said Lady Rivers, after a moment’s silence, during which her heart, deadened and choked with world dust as it was, had been rent with a sore pang. “You are sure there is no slip of paper inside the envelope with a more private word to me or you? This tells us nothing.”

“It is all there is; and, mamma, I am very sorry to see that you are so disappointed; but I think Constance is right: it would not do for her to begin writing private words to me, or even to you, now that she is Constance Forest. She cannot have anything really interesting to tell us, so she had much better hold her tongue.”

“My dear, I had a great deal to say to *my* mother the day after my wedding.”

“You, mamma! Yes.”

The tone in which this was said carried so much

suggestion with it, that Lady Rivers sat upright in her chair, and folded her hands in her lap preparatory to answering it.

“My dear Alma, I wish you would get out of the habit of insinuating things. I don’t think you can mean it, but really your manner of speaking of Constance’s engagement ever since it took place, and now of her marriage, would lead anyone who heard you to suppose that it was something forced upon her, instead of being her own deliberate choice, as you well know to have been the case.”

“No, mamma, I don’t mean to throw any blame of the kind on you; I beg your pardon if I have given that impression. I know that Constance chose her lot herself with her eyes open, and I really think she has taken what will suit her best: but, all the same, I doubt whether her thoughts about it just now will bear discussion with you or me, and I think she is wise to take the silent course, and work it into the best shape she can by herself.”

“I can’t see why she should not be radiantly happy and thankful to me, who have done so much for her, and by my exertions (for this is the case, Alma) enabled her to gain the position she is best suited for. Sir John Forest may not be as clever as your father or so agreeable as Wynyard Anstice——”

“There is no need to bring his name into the discussion, mamma.”

“Certainly not, except that you and your brothers have made so much more of him than he deserves; but, as I was saying, it is an enviable position Constance has gained, and I do think it is rather hard on me, who have toiled night and day for all your advancement, that when anyone of you succeeds you should grudge me the satisfaction of knowing you are content.”

“Dear mother, it is hard, but I think the fruit of the tree we are all of us busy gathering has that kind of taste. Constance has got her apple of Sodom, and it is a very handsome one to look at; we had better not insist on knowing exactly what she finds inside it, I think.”

“My dear Alma, at least I hope you will keep such reflections for home use.”

“You may depend on that, mamma; and after to-day, on this subject at least, I don’t think you will hear any more of them. You must please forgive me if I have made you uncomfortable, but you know, now that I have lost Constance, there is no one else to whom I can safely grumble on home subjects. However, I have done now, mamma. Let us turn to the other letters.”

A heap of invitations and notes of congratulation were examined, discussed, and put aside to be answered later,

and then Alma held up two thick letters to her mother's notice. "One is from Agatha from her convent, and the other from Aunt West : shall I read them aloud to you?"

Lady Rivers sank back in her chair with a look of real uneasiness and oppression now. "I don't think I can bear either to-night," she said ; "they must keep for a few hours. Whatever Agatha has found to say about her sister's marriage, I know it will be something to give me pain ; and the last time she wrote she signed herself, 'Sister Mary of Consolation,' as if to show how completely she had cut herself off from her own family. You may not readily believe it of me, Alma, but I could hardly get the thought of Agatha out of my head all yesterday, the bitter thought of her estrangement from me ; and you would have me suppose that I have lost Constance, too, in another way."

"I am sorry I said so much, mamma, for I am sure Constance will give you all the satisfaction out of her married life she can ; but how about Aunt West's letter?"

"Read it to yourself, and tell me by-and-by if there is anything that needs an answer. It can hardly be a pleasant letter. Of course your poor aunt must feel aggrieved, for I really have been obliged to neglect the Wests of late, and it is unfortunate that it should have happened so soon after the death of the little boy

which she took so much to heart. I am sure I felt for her at the time, but when, soon after, this affair of Constance's came on, I could not help my time and thoughts being greatly taken up. Lately I have not dared even to mention the name of West before your father, for fear he should take it into his head to insist that Emmie and Harry, and perhaps half-a-dozen more of them, should be asked to the wedding. Luckily your father never thinks of things unless they are actually brought before him. Of course I can't exactly explain to your poor aunt how it has been, or tell her I am determined to make up for my seeming neglect by doing all we can for them now."

"If they will let us."

"Ah, yes; Mr. West's temper is a great hindrance to the whole family, and poor Emmeline has always given way far too much to him. I think, even with all their misfortunes, she might with spirit have kept up the credit of the family better. I don't think I should ever have allowed children of mine to live in a house, the best rooms of which were let out to lodgers; *that* degradation, that last fatal step, I think, I should have had resolution to spare my family."

"Even with Mr. West for a husband. Mamma, what was Aunt Emmeline like when she was young—I don't

mean as to looks—I can imagine that well enough; but, in short, how did she ever come to marry Mr. West?”

“My dear, things looked very differently then from what they do now. When we two sisters were engaged about the same time, it was I who was thought to be doing the imprudent thing, and, so to speak, rather throwing myself away. Emmeline’s match was considered a very good one—the junior partner in an old London mercantile house. I can remember how my mother used to explain it to our visitors, and the touch of mortification I felt at the few words that came to my share. ‘Mr. Rivers is considered a clever man,’ my mother would say apologetically, ‘and though promotion is slow at the Bar, poor Agatha has made up her mind to take her chance with him.’ No one could have foreseen then how affairs would turn out, or the altered position we two sisters should stand in towards each other by the time our children were grown up.”

“So poor Aunt Emmeline has not even the satisfaction I always credited her with—of having a disinterested love match to look back upon.”

“You do so jump to conclusions, Alma. I never said your aunt did not love Mr. West when she married him. Of course she did, and was flattered by his choice of her, as well as very thankful to give such a triumph to her

father and mother, who had not had much prosperity in their early lives, I can tell you. She made them happy in their old age, and I often tell her the reflection should be a greater support to her in her misfortunes than I fear it is. At all events, she has a right to look for a like return from her own daughter."

"Poor little Emmie, I hope you won't impress that obligation too strongly upon her, mamma; she has burdens enough already, and had better let the matrimonial one wait a while. It is all very strange. Now I think of it, I can remember stories of Agatha's and Frank's childhood which always struck me as investing the Wests with quite a different relationship to ourselves from anything that Constance and I ever saw. I have felt dimly, but never realised, that they were the great people in those days, and that some strange jugglery must have taken place to alter the perspective so."

"No one can say, my dear, that prosperity has changed my feelings; it has only laid fresh duties upon me, and of course your poor aunt Emmeline's duties are changed too."

"As far as we are concerned, the life in Saville Street has faded into a dim background, which brings out all the sharp points of our prosperity, with different effects on the minds of the beholders—very different effects."

“You need not remind me of that, Alma ; it is never far from my thoughts, and you cannot wonder if I feel very little disposed to throw you younger ones much under Aunt Emmeline’s influence. I never can forget that it was after spending a month in Saville Street that Agatha first began to talk to me about her distaste of the world, and attraction toward sacred poverty, and to put forth the extraordinary views that have landed her where she is now.”

“Aunt West is not responsible, however, for the direction Agatha’s enthusiasm has taken ; she is quite as much puzzled at it as you are ; and to set against Agatha’s convent, in the scale of obligation between us and the Wests, you must put yesterday’s wedding. You may not be aware of it, but it was after an afternoon spent in Saville Street that Constance made up her mind to throw over young Lawrence for all the dances she had promised him at old Lady Forest’s ball, and forced herself to give Sir John the smile that settled his destiny for ever afterwards. I saw it all, and shall always maintain that if the atmosphere in the Wests’ little breakfast-room that day had been a whit more tolerable, and the boys’ manners just a shade more civilised, young Lawrence would have won the day, and been the bridegroom at Constance’s wedding yesterday.”

“Alma, what reckless talk! how can you allow yourself to indulge in it now?”

“Just this once more, mamma. As I said before, I have no one but you to grumble with, and after to-night I shall have so accustomed myself to the new state of affairs as not to care to talk about it. But I have done already. I am going to read the letters.”

The mere outside of these seemed to have effectually quelled Lady Rivers's activity, for she at last leaned back in her chair, and shaded her eyes with her hand, not to see Alma's face as she read the closely-written sheets slowly by the firelight. The flicker rose and fell, bringing out all manner of beautiful lights and shades on her sheeny silk dress, on the coils of soft light hair that lay low on her neck, and on a face, turned towards the flames, that was never hard to read, and that some people thought worthy of a good deal of study. Some people—others were apt to raise the question whether Alma Rivers would have passed for a beauty if the loveliness of her two sisters had not somehow involved her in a halo of admiration and observation that blinded the public eyes to her actual claims. And then would follow a criticism of features which demolished all her pretensions to the regular beauty they inherited from their mother, by showing how much likeness to her father there was in her spirited face.

It was almost ridiculous, people said, to catch under a wreath of flowers and braided hair, a resemblance to those strongly - marked characteristic features which political caricatures and illustrated journals had familiarised everybody with, and had held up again and again to public admiration or contempt. It really did make the homage paid to Alma as a reigning beauty almost absurd. But the homage continued to be paid through a second season when Lady Rivers's energetic management had taken her daughters *everywhere* ; and there was one at least of her admirers willing to allow that it was just those irregularities of form and flashes of expression to which other people objected, that gave her face its conquering charm, and made it the one beautiful face in the world for him.

Alma let the letters fall into her lap when she had read them, and sat with her hands clasped round her knees, looking into the fire, for a long time. There was perfect stillness at last, and the room was full of the scents of hothouse flowers, and of a ruddy fire-glow in which it was luxury to sit and dream, and there was, it must be confessed, a kind of luxury of sadness in the reverie to which Alma gave way. A sadness which was very far indeed from being pain, though, as the thought rose, large round tears gathered in Alma's beautiful eyes,

and made marks on the sheeny dress as they fell. She fancied herself very unhappy, for she had no experience which taught her the great gulf that lies between imaginative sorrows which can estimate the pathos of their own pain, and those vital ones which strike at the very root of thought; and she believed herself just now to have come to a point in her life when a great many cherished illusions must be parted with, and a reality she was not prepared for embraced. Henceforth, she was saying to herself, there would be much of solitude in her life, and if any important decision had to be made she must make it alone; and, what was worse, without any clear principles or even definite wishes to shape her determination upon. She had, she told herself, grown out of many splendid hopes of her youth, and the failure consisted rather in that she was disenchanted with herself than with her old ideals. The objects she had longed for might even be near, ready for her to take; but she doubted very much her own strength to choose them now, or rather to be satisfied with them when chosen. Was it strength or weakness, reasonableness or folly? she asked herself with a touch of self-contempt, which made her see the desirableness of opposite goods so strongly that she could not heartily wish for anything; or was she really at twenty so dusty and dried up with the

worldliness she had imbibed from her childhood as to have no power of *feeling* vividly, only this horrible power of *thinking*, of weighing everything in the balance, and finding it wanting? Why had Agatha deserted her? Agatha, through whose imagination she had been used to look at the world, who had invested the amusements and pursuits they had shared together with something that made them worth living for. Why had Agatha, suddenly at the end of one month of absence, come back translated as it were into a new world, the entrance-gate to which was for ever shut to Alma? Why had she deliberately stripped off the halo, she had herself given, from all their aims and pleasures, pronouncing them hollow and unsatisfying, and then stepped out into a sphere whose pure, cold, dazzling air Alma felt she could not breathe? Her hand strayed once during these thoughts to Agatha's letter lying on her lap, but she did not take it up. It was no use. It was too far off from her to be any help. The inward spiritual experiences it treated of were, for her, too unreal to have any comfort in them. Tears of real pain, but of the pathetic bearable sort still, came to her eyes as she murmured to herself:

“For this alone on Death I wreak
The wrath that garners in my heart;
He put our lives so far apart,
We cannot hear each other speak.”

Was the misfortune less when something else than death did this? when the body was left and the audible voice, and it was the soul that had gone too far off for thought to pass between it and those it had left? What silence was there so terrible as the silence that comes between souls that can no longer make each other understand, however loud they speak, or however closely and lovingly they whisper in the ear? For ever, Alma said to herself, must this silence reign between herself and her best-loved sister; and now Constance, her nursery companion, who had clung to her trembling a few hours ago, had been borne off—rather by the course of events, it seemed, than her own free will—into this unknown world of matrimony, to which certainly love had not given her a golden key. How would she fare in it? Was hers the substantial real world, and Agatha's only shadow; or was it just the other way? Was there a real world possible for those who, having tasted of the Sodom apples, had lost the power of distinguishing substance from shadow? Alma smiled with a little scorn of her self-scorn, as she asked the question, and then proceeded to justify it by a rapid survey of the lives she knew best—even Aunt West's, robbed of the spice of romance she had credited it with, beginning under false expectations, and ending in gloom—her mother's, which to outsiders looked such

a brilliant example of rewarded love, but from which, as she knew, love had long since been crowded out by hosts of uneasy cares and paltry ambitions. After all, since this same dust of care choked all roads alike, did it matter much by which gate one entered on one's destiny, love or worldly prudence? Had not Constance after all done well in ignoring the gate, and choosing what appeared the least uphill road, strewn with fewest stones to hurt her feet?

Alma thought she was relaly pondering this problem in the abstract, and trying to give it a dispassionate answer; and, all the time, it was not Constance's decision she was looking at. Her thoughts, like birds on the wing, were hovering, but never settling, round an application of the question that concerned herself. There it was in the distance, a very uphill road, but the gate looked golden enough. She was not nearly ready for a decision yet. She might never be ready, she told herself, but meanwhile there was at least interest in glancing furtively that way sometimes. If she could but see how the road would look a little farther on. If the hand that offered the key would remove some stones out of the way she was required to walk in; if he would even leave off putting down fresh stones; or if—if—looking down into her soul she could find strength to choose the stony path, and find the same

strange satisfaction in it that he seemed to find. Well—well—Constance's marriage, and yesterday's display, and the invitation sent to Lord Anstice that was due to his cousin, were threads of circumstance certainly not drawing her *that* way. She saw how they were being woven about her, and wondered whether she, like Constance, would wake up some day to find herself bound to a course she only half approved by a million slender invisible threads that could only be broken by the strength of a Hercules.

Alma had ample time for all these speculations, for this was one of the evenings when her father was not likely to return home till very late ; and under pretext of fatigue she and her mother had decided on keeping on their afternoon dresses, and indulging in a second tea in the inner drawing-room, instead of dinner.

Lady Rivers dearly loved this indulgence, but sternly refused it to herself, except on rare occasions, for fear her servants should guess that its enjoyment consisted in its being a renewal of old habits. When, an hour later, she and Alma were sitting together, with a comfortable meal spread on a small table by the fire, and a knock came at the front door, her face showed an extremity of dismay at which Alma could not help smiling.

“ Will Preston be so absurd as to let anyone in ? ” she

cried. "What o'clock is it, Alma? Only a quarter-past eight! We could not be supposed to be taking tea after dinner, and with *pâtés* and jelly on the table, at this hour."

"Only a very charitable person would give us the benefit of such a supposition, I am afraid, mamma. But don't be alarmed. I assure you I have seen Lady Forest sit down to tea on Sunday evening with a plate of radishes before her; and if our visitor at this untimely hour proves to be one of her set, I will take an opportunity of mentioning the circumstance."

"Pray don't be so absurd. Stay! It was not your father's knock; but surely that is his footstep on the stairs! What a comfort that it is only your father!"

But Lady Rivers rejoiced too soon. It was indeed the face of Lord Justice Rivers that appeared when the door opened; but other steps followed his to the inner room; and before she had finished her exclamations of surprise at her husband's unexpected return, Wynyard Anstice had shaken hands with Alma, and was making his way towards her, with a look on his face half deprecatory, half mischievously-triumphant, such as he used to confront her with in long past days, when he had been deputed by the school-room party to confess some desperate piece of mischief, in which all the juniors had been involved with him.

“I am perfectly aware I am doing what you don’t like in coming here this evening,” the look said; “but I don’t mean you to be angry with me. I am throwing myself on the good-natured side of your character, in whose existence I always mean to believe, however much your actions towards me belie it.”

She had never been able to resist feeling a sort of motherliness towards him, which his boyish confidence in her had called out in old times; and even now, vexed as she was, his winning face and manner conquered her again; and she shook hands and answered his inquiries after the newly-made Lady Forest with less coldness than had lately marked her attitude towards this least desirable of all Alma’s lovers. She did not even attempt to telegraph her vexation on to her husband; there was no use in directing displeased glances towards Sir Francis Rivers, for he never saw them. If he had ever listened to her hints about the undesirableness of encouraging Wynyard Anstice’s intimacy with the family, he had utterly forgotten by this time that such words had ever been spoken; and now he sat down with a provoking smile of complacency on his face, satisfied that he had done a sensible thing in bringing home an old family friend, on a vacant evening, and thus securing pleasant occupation for the ladies of the house, while he was set

free to enjoy the rare luxury of lounging in his easy-chair with an uncut quarterly which he had already taken from a side table in passing, and was nursing lovingly on his knee.

“Ah,” he said, glancing towards the table by the fire, and then at his wife, “I need not have dined at the club if I had known I should be released so early ; we would have had high tea together, my dear, in memory of old days, and I might almost have fancied ourselves back in our chambers at Gate Street, when the children were babies, and dinners were luxuries reserved for high days.”

Lady Rivers kept her face steadily turned towards the cup she was filling during this speech, and only Alma saw the beautiful look that shone from Wynyard Anstice's eyes towards her father. It stirred her with a vivid feeling that had pleasure, and a little pain in it too. She liked to see her father appreciated, above most things, but she was not sure that she wanted Wynyard Anstice to admire him exactly for the reason in his thoughts now. Encouragement in being unconventional and unworldly was precisely what Wynyard Anstice did not, in Alma's estimation, require. She might like these qualities in him ever so dearly far down in her inmost heart, but she saw, at the same time, that they would not aid him in

paving the smooth path she sometimes dreamed they might walk in together. The next moments brought her unmixed pleasure, for, while her father sipped his tea, keeping his finger on the page in the quarterly he was longing to plunge into, he carried on a desultory conversation with his guest, from which it appeared that a recent article of Mr. Anstice's had attracted her father's attention, and won his unqualified approbation as being a masterly piece of reasoning, for once unspoiled by reference to any particular crotchets. Alma even thought she observed a new air of respect in her father's manner, very different from the amused indulgence with which he had hitherto been in the habit of listening to young Anstice's arguments, when by-and-by a lively discussion grew out of this qualified praise. As she listened, turning her head from one speaker to the other, and now and then venturing to put in a playful word, a change seemed to come over her whole person; the cynical, weary look left her face; her brow cleared of its weight of discontent; her eyes took a new intensity of colour in their blue depths; the drooping mouth became full of spirit and tenderness. It was the look that was her father's, but with something higher added—a touch of enthusiasm that his face had lost. It was her highest self uppermost for the moment that looked out and showed

to some eyes that noted it well, what a stake it was for which the world and love were playing.

Meanwhile Lady Rivers was asking herself: "Could anything be more unfortunate?" Here was all her laborious twelve months' work in the way of being undone, by her husband, too! who professed—and, to do him justice, honestly intended—to leave the management of family politics in her hands. How it was that, with the reputation for wisdom the world gave him, he should show himself so thoroughly incompetent whenever he presumed to meddle in home affairs, was a standing puzzle to her, and constantly made her feel thankful that public business required so much less delicate handling than private that her husband's blundering could there pass for discretion. If the Government and the Bar had had the same opinion of the Justice's ability that long experience had brought to his wife, where would the prosperity of the family have been? It was indeed well that the coarser texture of men's dress was suited to their coarser wits. This reflection soothed the extremity of Lady Rivers's irritation, and enabled her to see that her own consummate prudence would be best shown to-night by standing aside, and letting the unfavourable current that had set in run its course. So when the happy moment came for the Justice, when, without rudeness,

he could turn to his book, she established herself in a shady corner of the sofa, which always meant sleep, and saw Alma go to the piano, far away in the arctic regions of the great drawing-room, without a word of objection. Open love-making she knew she had not to fear, and other words, however deep an impression they might make on two hearts, might easily hereafter be explained away. It was, after all, only a desultory conversation that set in, in intervals between Alma's playing; a few sentences merged into the music, and then taken up again. Alma was not in the mood to begin upon one of the half-bantering, half-serious arguments which, for the last year or two, since she was quite grown up, had been the style of discourse she had usually fallen into with her old playmate, and she was afraid of getting any nearer to what Mr. Carlyle would call "sincere speech." It was not till after quite half an hour's music that she ventured on a remark bearing in any way on what she was thinking about. She had just brought Schumann's "Schlummerlied" to an end, and with her fingers resting on the keys, ready to dash into a waltz, if necessary, she said:

"I am glad you had the sense not to congratulate me when you came in to-day."

"I am a great deal too unhappy myself at another

defection from our schoolroom party of long ago to think of such a thing. There will be no one of us left soon."

"Except myself. 'A scolding woman in a wide house.'"

"A queen who has driven all her subjects away, satisfied with the wide house," Anstice corrected, venturing a steady look into Alma's face, that was turned up to him with a half-mocking, half-defiant expression on it.

"You think I have hectored my sisters out of the house, and the poor boys too ; what an opinion you must have of my temper to be sure."

"You know that was not what I was thinking."

"Well, but don't you want to know how we all looked and behaved yesterday ?"

"Unexceptionably, I am sure ; and, as for looks, I suppose none of you can have looked at the bride without thinking how strongly her likeness to your other sister came out under her white veil."

"How do you know ? Your cousin could not have told you that."

"My own eyes did. You don't believe I should lose such an opportunity for a critical look at you all, do you ? I was up in the gallery all the time watching and comparing."

“Comparing?”

“Yes, I may as well tell you at once what I called this evening principally to find an opportunity of saying to you. A fortnight ago I was in Paris, staying with a friend whose wife has lately become an ardent Roman Catholic. She was full of a grand ceremony that was to take place at a convent near. I went with her, and through a phalanx of gratings, had a glimpse of your sister Agatha, in what I suppose was her last public appearance. I could not make out the ceremony. It seemed to me a sort of travesty of a wedding followed by a funeral, ‘crowned and buried.’ And your sister looked so like herself all the while that I had to rub my eyes every now and then to be convinced I was not dreaming one of our old charade-actings over again.”

“Do you think she saw you?”

“Oh no; I was cooped up in a crowd behind close gratings. I don’t suppose I had any right to be there; but my friend’s wife had my edification strongly at heart, and stretched a point. I am afraid she is founding very false hopes on the interest she saw that the ceremony excited in me.”

“Tell me again how Agatha looked—was it really as Constance looked yesterday?”

“I never thought them as much alike as other people

did, you know; but yesterday, when I had a moment's good view of your sister Constance, as she turned to you just before kneeling down, I could almost have thought myself in that convent chapel again, and that the face was Agatha's—almost, for an instant; the second impression, of course, was of the difference."

"Tell me about that."

"It is difficult to put into words."

"You must try, or you should not have begun to speak about it."

"Well, if I must, let me see. I think I can only say it was a difference in degree, something added to the Convent Bride's look. The fear on Constance's face was awe on Agatha's, and the clinging dependence which made yesterday's bride cast so many reluctant looks back on you, gave Agatha's eyes an inward expression, as if she were gathering strength from some felt but unseen presence. I don't know which was the most beautiful after all; but Agatha's face was the thing to remember."

"And we were none of us there. I wonder if we should any of us have so much as seen all *that* if we had been there."

So far apart we cannot hear each other speak.

The words rushed into Alma's mind again, and with them came quick tears, that having once been indulged

refused to be sent back to their source unshed. She turned her head as far from the light as possible, but could not conceal that in an instant her face was wet.

Lady Rivers would have been ready to faint with dismay, if she had roused herself at that moment from pleasant dreams to such a sight—Alma weeping silently, and Wynyard Anstice looking on with an intensity of sympathy and emotion on his always expressive face, that might well make her thankful for the blinding effect of tears on Alma. The danger to her was only momentary however. Mr. Anstice got up hastily and walked to a distant table, where, with his back to Alma, he stood nervously fingering the ornaments, and clasping and unclasping photograph-books. It had been a great shock to him, and he had as much need of a struggle to get back into his ordinary drawing-room self as had Alma. He had never seen tears in her eyes in his life before, never. Not even in her childhood, when at partings, or meetings, or pathetic readings, which had moved her sisters to tears, she had always remained bright and defiant.

The times when in confidential talk her eyes had softened in his sight were epochs to be chronicled for the effect they had had far down in his inmost soul. He heard a large tear fall on one of the music-sheets she was gathering up in her hands, as his thoughts reached this point,

and it sent a thrill through him. A thrill that was not all sympathy with her pain, there was a pang for himself as well as for her. When he had entered the room to-night he believed that a contest which had long disturbed his life was decided for ever, a victory won, and that he had only come to look once more on a lost love. What was there in this sudden rain of tears for Agatha to water the dead hopes, the buried unrest (which he had so congratulated himself on having securely buried) and cause them to spring up into life again stronger and greener than ever? Nothing absolutely. It was most unreasonable to feel that, by revealing so much of her soul to him, Alma had laid a new claim on his devotion; but he did somehow so feel, and he could not all in a moment decide whether it was in pain or triumph that he took up the old burden again, resolving to carry it at all events a little farther on the road. He only knew that each tear, as it fell, had struck on his heart and left a trace there that would not be easily worn out; whether it was destined to fester into one of those sore spots that make memory a torment, or deepen and widen into a fountain of life-long joy. Alma was innocent of the smallest design or wish to excite so much emotion. She was deeply ashamed of her tears long before the power to restrain them came, and by the time she had strangled the last sob and brought her eyes into something

like order, the feeling that had called them forth had evaporated into an absorbing anxiety to look as usual when the now fast-approaching inevitable moment came, when Lady Rivers should awake from her nap and come into the room to end this perilous interview with such words of polite dismissal as she so well knew how to administer to an unwelcome guest.

Alma's first sentence, when she came up to the table and addressed Mr. Anstice, was spoken in a light, indifferent tone that jarred strangely on his mood.

"You won't find any record of yesterday there," she began. "We were not guilty of having ourselves photographed in our wedding dresses. You had better question me unless you have heard all the gossip from your cousin already. I know you are quite capable of cross-examining him on the minutest details, for you always were the news-monger of our society."

He was silent, not being able at once to get back into a lightness of tone that would match hers; and Alma rattled on, throwing an accent of warning into her next sentence.

"Mamma, would you believe it? Mr. Anstice will not allow that he took enough interest in us to ask his cousin how our wedding went off yesterday. Is such total lack of curiosity credible in him?"

Lady Rivers, who had entered the outer room just as Alma left the piano, now came forward into the circle of lamplight with an expression of some anxiety on her face. Had maternal vigilance slept too long and given time for the occurrence of a frightful calamity? A glimpse at Alma's tear-stained face made her heart absolutely stand still, but turning to Wynyard she saw a look of pain on his that sent up her spirits many degrees at once. Was it even better than she had dared to hope? Had he spoken again, poor fellow? and had Alma, like a sensible, good girl, given him his final dismissal? That would indeed be fortunate, and leave the way clear and open for delicate schemes which her genius, now that Alma was the only one left to scheme for, was longing to elaborate. This pleasing supposition lent quite a motherly tone of interest to her voice and smile, as she turned to the young man, who had once long ago, in the character of her favourite son's safest comrade, shared her matronly solicitude to a certain small extent.

"We know Mr. Anstice's friendly feeling towards the family too well," she said, "not to be sure that nothing but a really pressing engagement would have prevented his being with us, or, at all events, full of thought for us on such an important day."

"I had no engagement. I did not come to you yester-

day because I was not asked," he said, looking full at her. Lady Rivers did not expect such a bold thrust even from Wynyard Anstice's unconventional sincerity, but she was equal to the occasion.

"We hardly thought a formal invitation necessary with you, as our note to your cousin warned you of the day; but, however, you did not lose anything by not coming. We were all too sad to be pleasant company, and even Sir Francis broke down in his speech. Your cousin will have told you."

"I have not seen him since yesterday morning."

"He was very undutiful then," cried Alma, whose cheek had burned under her mother's implied falsehood, and who was longing to put an end to the conversation. "He told me he meant to report himself to you on the first moment of his release, and seemed perfectly aware that his *raison d'être* was to see everything with your eyes and carry it to you."

Mr. Anstice smiled. "I know you have a theory of your own about my cousin's character; but now you know him better, don't you see more in him than the sort of devoted SMIKE you chose to fancy him in old days?"

"SMIKE! Oh no. I never thought of anything so racy. My types for you and your cousin were taken from a tale of Madame de Genlis's we used to read in the school-

room—"Alphonse and Thélismar"—the *dérégulé* young French noble and his philosophical friend, who brought him back to reason by discourses on nature and the general course of things."

"I hope yesterday made you ashamed of the inexactness of your portrait-painting then."

"Well, I will confess I was a little disappointed. Lord Anstice did not talk so much like Alphonse as I had expected, nor display so much devotion to Thélismar as" (lowering her tone) "I perhaps think past and present circumstances warrant."

"I have always told you you misunderstand those same circumstances."

Lady Rivers did not hear the lowered tones, but she had caught the word "disappointed," and could not resist putting in a word on a subject which was always more or less in her thoughts whenever she saw Alma and Wynyard Anstice together.

"You must not be surprised if we all feel a little disappointed on first acquaintance with your cousin. We naturally expect a great deal from a person in whose favour, as it seems to us, you voluntarily cut yourself off from all your prospects in life, and from your older friends."

It was meant for a stinging reproach to Wynyard,

but all the pain it gave came to Alma. To him it was almost incomprehensible, so distorted was the view of the facts to which it alluded.

Some years ago, when the Riverses first knew him, he and his younger cousin had been equally dependent for education and advancement in life on the head of their family, a bachelor uncle, with an old title and large unentailed estates. The younger and the least promising lad represented the elder branch and was heir to the title; but Wynyard had always been his uncle's favourite, and was looked upon as likely to inherit the larger portion of his wealth, till a few months before the old man's death, when he managed to quarrel with him on some abstract questions of principle and conduct, and so offended him by maintaining his own contrary views, on a public occasion, that he was never received into favour again. When a little later the uncle died and the will came to be read, it was found that the despotic old man had heaped the whole of his great wealth on the nephew who, though less satisfactory in conduct, had allowed his theories to be prescribed for him, and had left the one best loved to fight out a position in the world he had elected to live in, after fashions of his own.

This change in Mr. Anstice's circumstances had occurred about two years ago, just at the time when his

attachment to Alma began to be talked about ; and Lady Rivers never could forgive the part he had acted in ruining himself. If a totally unattached young man of her acquaintance chose to be quixotic, and recklessly throw away the good gifts fortune had designed for him, a quiet pity for his folly, and a resolute avoidance of him in future, was all the notice that it was necessary for her to take of his misconduct. But when the young man had already taken the liking of a girl of good position into his keeping, and when that girl was her own most attractive daughter, the indignation that swelled her motherly heart was too bitter to be quietly borne. It was always waking up and rousing her into expressions of hostility that her better judgment deprecated—the more so as Alma could never be made to express satisfactory condemnation of her lover's conduct. Yet the invectives were not altogether lost. Alma did not acquiesce when her mother told her again and again that Wynyard Anstice's real care to win her was to be estimated by the lightness with which he had thrown away the conditions that made such winning possible ; but the words rankled and made a sore wound in her mind that winced whenever it was touched. The pain she felt just now stung her into something like defiance, and determined her to persevere in the low-toned talk it was meant to interrupt.

“I am really sorry you did not see your cousin yesterday afternoon,” she said; “I had given him a message for you, and he promised me to look you up, in whichever of your haunts you might be.”

“The haunt which actually held me was one where I don’t think his courage would have been sufficient to induce him to follow me. At the time when your party broke up, I was speaking in a lecture-room in an out-of-the-way place in the East-end, at a meeting convened to discuss woman’s suffrage, among other social questions.”

Alma’s face clouded again; every fresh instance of Mr. Anstice’s disposition to take up unpopular subjects struck her as a sort of slight to herself.

“How can you go to such places? making people talk of you, and hindering your getting on in your profession, and lowering papa’s opinion of your good sense. Why can’t you give up such freaks now?” she asked, putting a greater amount of pleading in her voice than she was quite aware of.

“I did not intend to take part in the discussion when I went in; I was moved to it by what I thought unfair hostility shown towards a lady, who got up in the body of the meeting and pleaded woman’s rights, not so much to votes as to wider spheres of work, in a speech that was a good deal above the heads of most of the people

there. I will confess, however, that I was struck with her remarks before the row began, and with herself too, for she was no common-looking person, I can tell you, in spite of the company she had got herself among. Perhaps some people—I don't say myself, but some people—might even have thought it worth while to miss a wedding-breakfast for the sake of hearing and seeing her."

"Then I suppose she is young and handsome, in spite of *Punch's* last week's picture. But she must be a monster to go to a meeting of rough people, and get up and speak. I can't think how you can defend such conduct."

"I don't defend it; I only say that, being present, I was struck with what she said, and how she looked while saying it."

"So handsome?"

"No, not at all handsome; but a very unforgettable face all the same."

"Did you make out her name?"

"I heard it spoken by some people near—Miss Moore—Katherine Moore, I believe they called her; and as you seem curious about her looks, here is an outline sketch I took of her, before I grew too much interested in what she was saying to do anything but listen."

"Katherine Moore——"

Alma repeated the name musingly, as she examined a pocket-book page, on which was sketched hastily, but effectively, a strongly-featured expressive face, with dark level brows, wide forehead, full well-shaped mouth, and indented chin.

“Katherine Moore—how strange. I believe she must be the elder of the two sisters to whom Aunt West——”

Alma stopped short, arrested by an agonised look from her mother; and Lady Rivers finished her sentence—
“One of the orphans whom my sister, Mrs. West, has received into her house as companions to her daughter.”

“Poor little Emmie West,” said Alma quickly, to stop further explanation, “how will she like companions who get themselves into rows at public meetings, I wonder? I must go and look her up, I think, now that all our gaieties are over.”

“Miss West,” cried Anstice. “Ah! she was not at the wedding any more than myself then? Why should not I look her up, that we may condole with each other, and then perhaps” (with a malicious smile towards Alma)
“I shall see my lady orator again.”

Mr. Anstice took his departure soon after this, and Alma got a lecture from her mother for making her eyes red, for showing too much interest in Wynyard Anstice’s doings, and for bringing in her aunt’s name in conver-

sation with people who did not belong to the family. How strange it was that she who was reputed so clever should make more mistakes than Constance ever did, and never allow her mother the repose of feeling she might be trusted!

It certainly had not been a pleasant evening; and yet Alma, as she sat staring into her bedroom-fire before going to bed, felt not happier, perhaps, but fuller of life than she had felt for many long days. The hurry of engagements and gaieties in which she lived had lately been growing so meaningless and vapid to her, it was a comfort to be raised out of its dust, even by sensations of pain—pain of such sort at least as this evening's reflections and the sight of Wynyard Anstice had brought with it. It was not a new pain, nor even a new light upon it, only the old puzzle that she had pondered again and again. Could he really love her, so very much as his eyes sometimes said, when his own hand had put away the right to ask for her, and when even now he was putting all manner of crotchets before the purpose of climbing quickly up again to such a height as would enable her to look upon him with favour once more. If Alma had been asked if she could appreciate the sentiment of the poet-soldier, who sang:

I could not love thee, dear, so much,
Loved I not honour more,

she would have answered: "Yes, certainly;" but then surely *that* meant honour such as the world could recognise—honour that could be reflected back in a halo round the beloved head; not subtle scruples like these, self-sacrifices that nobody asked—delicate weighings of more or less worth in work for the world, such as the world would never understand, and that were due to some overstrained unrecognised sense of duty to powers out of sight.

Surely such mere floating thought-motes as these ought to be blown away by the strong gusts of passion? What was the worth of a love that barriers unseen by most eyes could hold back? Sadly, after long musing, Alma gave the old answer to this question, and then she knelt down and went through her prescribed round of evening devotions, not recognising that the decision she had just come to was a distinct denial of there being any unseen Presences to pray to.

CHAPTER II.

THE VALLEY OF HUMILIATION.

If we sink low,
If the lost garden we forego
Each in his day, nor ever know
But in our poet souls its face ;
Yet we may rise until we reach
A height untold of in its speech—
A lesson that it could not teach
Learn in this darker dwelling-place.

THE clinging damp of a rainy November evening, while it stayed outside well-fenced houses, like Lady Rivers's, crept uncomfortably through and through the ground-floor rooms of a large scantily-furnished, ill-warmed, and ill-lighted house at the opposite end of London. It brought out a slimy perspiration on the passage walls and hung misty halos round the dim gas-burners, so that they seemed to have withdrawn themselves miles away, and to be acting as signals in a fathomless distance. Perhaps it was the uncomfortable impression of desolate space thus created which made the two occupants of one of the

largest of these ground-floor rooms sit close together on an old-fashioned couch ranged against the wall, apparently a mile or two from the fireplace, where a black fire['] built up to give out heat some time, but not now, smouldered dully. Quite out of the way of heat and light these two persons had been sitting for at least an hour, and if they were not chilled to the bone, it must have been owing to a certain soft glow of love-light which shone from their eyes whenever in the course of a confidential low-toned talk they had looked at each other. Two pairs of velvety-brown eyes these were which thus interchanged love-light; too exactly alike in shape and colour, and sweep of silken lashes to belong to lovers in the ordinary sense of that word, and having just the contrast of expression, lovingly trustful and lovingly anxious, which might be expected from the actual relationship of their owners. Mother and daughter, the one a thin, worn, sad-looking woman, the other a vigorous, bright girl, whose face, full of delicate colouring and light, spoke of an eager temperament and naturally gay spirits toned just now to seriousness by the quick sympathy that reflected every mood of those she loved.

Something very important had to be decided, something which, so far as the conversation had gone at present, threatened equal pain to her mother, whichever

way it was settled ; and as Emmie West leaned her soft pink cheek against her mother's worn forehead, her eyes (now that all the arguments she could think of had come to an end) had a sorrowful dumb entreaty in them, which her mother felt without being able to satisfy.

“*Do* make up your mind to choose the least painful course, and *do* be as little unhappy as possible about it,” the yearning eyes, hungry for a little joy, said ; and sad-hearted Mrs. West stooped down and kissed them, not having any more satisfactory answer to give to this appeal—an appeal which she was apt to read in her children's eyes many times every day. It was not so much that she had lost the art of making the best of things, but that another influence stronger than even her children's, perpetually forced her to look on the gloomy side.

Life had been hard on Mr. West, on the husband who had in her youth honoured her by thrusting unexpected elevation upon her, and now that the world had turned against him, she felt it would be disloyal in her to see anything but gloom in a state of things in which he had fared so ill. Who had he to feel with him but herself ?—not even his children, poor, thoughtless, light-hearted things ; and how could his sorrows be adequately mourned, unless her heart were always bleeding ? If now and then,

on rare occasions, when Mr. West was away, and not likely to return for a longer interval than usual, she was drawn on by her eldest son's gay, good temper, and her daughter's sweet coaxing, to listen to the young people's schemes for the future (in which, to be sure, there was never any mention made of Mr. West), and she let her thoughts take a slight tinge of rose colour from their inexperienced hopefulness, her conscience always smote her afterwards, and she reproached herself, as if her momentary escape from gloom had been an act of unfaithfulness to her husband. Just now, however, there was no question of escape. Mr. West might be expected home any minute, the fire was ready to be broken into a blaze when his foot was heard on the scraper, and she and Emmie were tremblingly discussing the safest way of accomplishing a sacrifice on his behalf which must be so carried out, that, while he profited by it, he should not have the least idea that it had been made for him.

"My dear, I don't think I can make up my mind to-night," Mrs. West was saying. "We had better lock up the box again, and put it back on my dressing-table before your father comes in. I would not have him go upstairs and miss it, and find out what we have been talking about for the world."

"Mamma, I wonder——" Emmie began hesitatingly

—paused—and then hurried on as if half afraid of what she was saying. “Mamma, I wonder whether it might not be better after all to do it openly. Why should you have the pain of parting with your treasures, and the fright as well, which half kills you, of pretending to have got them all the same? Why should not papa know? Perhaps he would leave off expecting so much if he quite understood what a hard struggle it is for you to provide the little luxuries you say are so necessary for him. Let me go on, dear, and say what I have on my mind just this once. I *don't* think it is a fair division for you to have all the giving up, and all the pain of concealment as well. Katherine Moore says that women ought not to do such things; that they should act openly and independently, and then they would not be trampled upon.”

“Trampled upon?” A look of almost wild horror flitted across Mrs. West's face. “Oh, Emmie, my dear, how could she have such a thought about me? You must not get it into your head, darling, or it will make me feel very wicked, as if I had terribly misrepresented things as they stand between your father and me. Trampled upon! Don't you understand, darling, that there is nothing I don't *want* to do for him and all of you? If letting oneself be trampled upon would do any good, and keep humiliation from him and you, there would be no pain in

it. It would not degrade me. The pain is that I am such a useless person, and can do so little to serve him and you all."

"It seems to me that you do everything, and bear all the pain."

"That is because I talk about it like a woman, and your father is silent to everybody but me; but, oh Emmie, he suffers for us all! I read the bitter pain that cuts down to the very bottom of his soul whenever he is made aware of any fresh privation we have to bear. It hurts him and humbles him down to the ground, though he can only show what he feels by short, sharp words. I understand, if you younger ones don't; and, darling, we will struggle to spare him little mortifications as long as we can; when there is nothing more to be done we will sit still and bear the will of God. Perhaps, when we have done all we can, the worst, if it comes, will bring a sort of peace."

"Or good fortune will come at last; and, mamma, you must not say that we young ones don't feel for papa. Harry does at all events. I really think he is almost as anxious to keep disagreeable things from papa's sight, and to provide against his being crossed in his fidgets, as you are. Do you know that ever since old Mary Anne refused to clean knives and shoes for lodgers, Harry has

got up an hour earlier, and gone downstairs, and done all that part of the work before anyone else is up? This puts Mary Anne into such good humour, that she takes pains with the breakfast again, and sends up the one rasher, and the two bits of toast, and the thick bread-and-butter, with as much ceremony as if it were a Lord Mayor's feast. You have not been downstairs to see lately; but I assure you papa has looked almost satisfied; and yesterday he actually remarked that his boots were well blacked, and supposed we had got a new boy, and Sidney was so tickled at the idea, Harry had to kick him under the table to keep him from exploding. It's all Harry's doing, and I do believe he does it quite as much for papa's sake, as for yours."

"My own boy," said Mrs. West, fervently; and as she spoke her worn face glowed, and a smile broke over it, obliterating for a moment its lines of care and pain, and making it almost as fair and young as Emmie's.

"But you won't love him better than me," said Emmie, pretending to pout; "that would not be a good return for my giving myself up to you body and soul, and seeing only you in the world, would it, mother darling? I agree with Katherine Moore that women can understand and love each other best, and should stick to each other through thick and thin. Let the men fight for themselves,

and help themselves, I say. I will take care of you, mother."

"Well then, dearest, I ought not to think of myself as poorer than your poor Aunt Rivers, who seems to be in the way of losing all her daughters, while I am to keep mine."

"And, mamma," cried Emmie, eagerly, "that is another reason for your making up your mind to-day about the necklace. I forgot to mention it before, but it is a reason."

"You're never meaning to leave me, darling?"

"No, but my not having been invited to Constance's wedding. I will confess something to you, mother. I have often thought I should like to wear that necklace just once. I remember how I used to admire it when I was a little child, and you put it on to go out with papa to some grand party, and he used to come out of his dressing-room, when you were ready, and look—you know how, mamma, as he never looks now—proud of you, and of everything about him. I used to think then that wearing a pearl necklace meant being grown up, and beautiful, and perfectly happy. When I heard that Constance Rivers was engaged to be married, it did come into my mind that I might be asked to be one of her bridesmaids, and that perhaps Aunt Rivers would give me a dress such as would not disgrace the necklace, and that, for once, I

could have looked so that the Rivers's need not be ashamed of me. But the opportunity has passed, you see. I was not invited to the wedding, and I don't now believe I ever shall be asked to the Rivers's on any grand occasion; they look down upon us too much now. The necklace had better go, and not tantalise us any longer by lying idle in the jewel-box. I should not wonder, if after paying all these bills, and buying what you want for papa, and putting aside a little fund for emergencies, we might get a new floorcloth for the front hall out of the money the sale will bring. It would be a real load off my mind if we could do that, for I am quite certain the old one can't be put down again after another spring cleaning. Imagine our feelings if Aunt Rivers or the new Lady Forest were to call here some day and have to put their feet absolutely on bare boards! I don't think we should ever get Aunt Rivers into the sitting-room, she would faint in the hall; and I am sure no one in this house could carry her back into her carriage. We should never hear the last of it."

"My darling, it was of your own wedding-day, not of Constance Rivers's, that I have thought, when in many a time of sore need I have put back the necklace into its case. Your father gave it me on the day you were christened, and I have a feeling that it is robbing you to

send it away. I should have liked him to clasp it round your neck before he gave you away to anyone."

"Mamma," said Emmie, after a moment's pause, with a richer flush than usual on her cheek, but a resolute tone of reasonableness in her voice, "Katherine Moore says it is quite time that girls left off looking upon marriage as the one object of their existence. She says it is an accident of life that occurs now to fewer and fewer women every year, and that girls should plan their lives without any reference to it whatever."

"I am afraid very few of them will do so, my dear, in spite of Katherine Moore."

"But at all events I can, mamma," said Emmie, sitting a little more upright, and pushing her soft brown hair from her forehead, with a decided little gesture that had perhaps been caught from Katherine Moore. "I can make up my mind to look at things as they really are, and face them resolutely without deluding myself with vain expectations. Now let us consider, dear. I hardly ever go anywhere except now and then to drink tea in the 'land of Beulah,' and that counts for nothing, as Mrs. Urquhart only asks me when she is alone. And if by a rare chance I do get an invitation to an evening party, and accept it, I am always sorry afterwards, for I don't feel at home among the other girls when I am

there. It can't be helped, mother dear. I have not sat or stood in corners at Aunt Rivers's Christmas parties without finding out exactly how everybody looks at one when one has on the shabbiest dress in the room. Last Christmas a gentleman found me out in my corner, and sat talking to me a long time, and I thought perhaps he found me rather nice till Alma came and explained to me that Mr. Anstice was something of an oddity himself, and always made a point of talking to the person in the company most likely to be overlooked by everybody else. It was ever so nice of him, but it was not the kind of compliment that encourages one to go out again, was it, mamma?"

"My darling, you know I would spare you Aunt Rivers's parties if I could, since I can't dress you for them as I should like; but—but—if Aunt Rivers took offence at my keeping you away, and your father were to begin to suspect her of slighting us——"

"Ah, yes, I know; and besides, dear mamma, I generally like the thought of the party beforehand well enough; and Alma is sometimes kind; or if not, and the reality is worse than I look for, I can always now run up to 'Air Throne' the next morning, and laugh over my mortifications with the two Moores, till I get not to care for them. I was not complaining, mother dear; but I want you to face the real state of things; give up

impossible hopes, and sell the necklace. It won't be wanted *ever* for such a day as you fancied ; but we shall have other happy days—great days for the boys perhaps, or even for me, in some other way than marriage. You should hear how the Moores talk. Till these good times come, there is a great deal of pleasure to be got out of the world, even in shabby clothes, and with all our worries and troubles, if you, mother, would only pluck up your courage again. Very nice bits come in between whiles for us young ones. Fun in the back sitting-room of evenings, while you and papa are sitting here dolefully ; and delicious talks with the Moores in ' Air Throne,' and cosy times with dear old Mrs. Urquhart in the ' Land of Beulah.' Does it not sometimes make you dread misfortune a little less when you see that our great crisis—the crisis that you thought would break your heart—of our having to take lodgers into our house, has ended in making us happier ? At least, I know I am a great deal happier since the Moores came ; and Harry and the boys have quite got over the little mortification it was to them at first, in the fun of giving odd names to the new divisions of the house. If Aunt Rivers chooses to be ashamed of us, and to send us to Coventry, we can bear it ; and you won't think us unsympathising, will you, dear, for being able to get a little amusement out of what seemed such a terrible sorrow at first ?”

Mrs. West thought of the contraction that came on her husband's brow whenever, in the course of their long, silent evenings, the sound of a bell from the upper story reminded him that he was no longer sole master of the house in which he had been born, but she could not quench the light in Emmie's beautiful eyes by such an allusion.

"Whatever makes you happy is good for me," she said, gently stroking her daughter's hair back into its usual becoming waves over her forehead, and thus obliterating the little attempt to look like Katherine Moore that had its terrors for her, though she said nothing about it. "I am sure I hope the Moores' coming will prove good for us all. As your cousins keep so much out of the way, I like you to have other companions."

"Friends," corrected Emmie, eagerly; "friends who will do more for us than all the Riverses put together ever would. Mamma, if you do not mind my telling Katherine about the necklace, I believe her advice will be very useful. She gives lessons on two evenings in the week to a young man who is a working jeweller, and I dare say he could tell us what the necklace is really worth, or even manage the sale for us, if you liked to trust him. I know you don't wish Harry to have anything to do with it."

“My dear, I hope the young man does not come here. What would your father say if he met him, and heard that one of the young lady lodgers gave him lessons? He would think it a monstrous thing! He would want us to turn the Moores out of the house at once. I had no idea myself that Katherine gave lessons to young men—and shopmen too.”

“Dear mamma, she thinks nothing of it. You must not judge the Moores as you would anybody else. They are to be judged in quite a different way; and no one but Katherine can explain it. However, you need not be at all uneasy. She never brings any of her pupils up to ‘Air Throne’—that is, Christabel’s shrine—to draw and write and paint in. Katherine would not desecrate it, she says, by bringing drudgery there. She goes out to give her lessons, and I believe this is one of the evenings. Let me take the jewel-case to her and speak about it now; in another minute papa will come in; and I am sure you will feel happier for having come to a decision. It may be a long time before you and I can have such another long uninterrupted talk, and it would be a pity to let it go for nothing. Would you like to look at the necklace, and say good-bye to it before it goes, mamma?”

Emmie’s finger, as she spoke, was on the spring of

the purple case which she had previously taken from the box on her knee, and her eyes looked pleasantly expectant, but her mother made a hasty negative gesture.

“No, no, dear, I don’t want to look at it again. I said good-bye to all that it means for me a long, long time ago; and if you are not to wear it, I had rather never see it. Put the case into your pocket, and carry it to Katherine while papa and I are at dinner. If we women can manage the matter among ourselves, I shall be thankful. My conscience will be easier for not having drawn Harry into our little conspiracy, since I must conceal it from your father for the present. There, is not that papa’s step outside? Run away, dearest—run away, and put the jewel-box exactly in its usual place on my dressing-table, so that there may be nothing to strike your father’s eye when he goes into the room to dress for dinner. I shall tell him that I have been obliged to part with the necklace, some day, Emmie dear; but I want to spare him the pain of knowing exactly when it was done, and of following us in all the painful little details of the business. The loss is his as well as ours; but we can spare him part of the degradation. Yes, run away, Emmie dear, and leave me alone. Your father likes best now to find me alone here when he first comes in, weary and out of spirits.”

CHAPTER III.

IDUNA'S GROVE.

Treasures there are many,
Necklaces many ;
But on the breast
Of Freyja alone
Glitters the noble
Brísinga necklace.

** Norse Lay.*

MR. WEST was accustomed to have to wait even on cold evenings a long time at his own door before it was opened to him, and he had learned to shut his ears, when at last he was admitted, to a good many sounds of scuffling feet and sharp voices, which told of hasty preparations to receive him. He did not care now to probe beyond the outside surface of decorum and order, which was indeed too thin to deceive eyes that did not court deception. There had been a time when he had stood up for his right to know everything that passed in his own house, and devoutly believed in his power to

regulate all in his own way, and carry out his wishes to the minutest point. He had been a martinet when nothing had opposed him but the wills of people weaker than himself. Lately, circumstances, and, as it had seemed to him, the whole course of nature had declared against him; and being continually more and more worsted in his combats with these, he had withdrawn himself gradually into closer and closer entrenchments, abandoning the outworks in despair, but always struggling to keep some little kingdom where his will might be supreme, and whose minute details he might regulate. The management of his family and household had baffled him now for some time, and he was at present, with the energy of despair, holding on to the attempt to maintain his own personal surroundings precisely as they used to be in the days of his prosperity. Even this possibility was daily slipping away, in spite of the efforts of his wife and elder children to keep this last stronghold of his injured dignity intact. They were wondering, with sick hearts, what hold on life he would have when the thin appearance of past gentility they were holding up before his eyes had at length melted away.

Emmie had time to restore the jewel-box to its usual place before Mary Anne had made herself fit to open the door for master, and her next movement was a hasty

flight up two staircases to the threshold of "Air Throne." Thence she watched her father's entrance into the house, peeping at him over the balusters of the highest staircase of the high house. She was not at any time given to make the worst of appearances, but to-day she was struck with the dejection written on her father's face, and expressed by his whole figure, as he wearily mounted the first flight to his own bedroom: the nerveless hand clinging to the balusters, the trailing footstep, the bowed head, the gray, still face, that had perhaps been handsome and dignified once, but that seemed now petrified to an image of sullen, outraged pride, brooding on itself. Emmie sighed and shivered a little as she looked. It was just as if the fog outside had gathered itself up into a visible shape, and stalked into the house to put out all the lights, and hang a dead weight on everyone's breathing. But it was her father, and she must not grudge him the privilege of bringing what atmosphere he liked into the house, during the few hours he was in it, even if it was an atmosphere of chill, gloomy reserve, in which the most modest little household joys withered, or had to hide themselves away. Her mother was unfortunately the chief sufferer, for she had to sit in the very thickest of the fog the whole evening. To the other members of the family it made itself felt more or

less distinctly, hushing fresh voices, putting clogs on springing steps, checking with a dull hand the eager beating of young, hopeful hearts. But (and Emmie's sensitive conscience reproached her a little for finding relief in this thought) there were spots even under this roof whence the dark influence was successfully shut out—pleasant nooks—when, by just opening and shutting a door, one could find oneself breathing fresh air and morally basking in sunshine. As this thought rose to comfort her, she turned and looked down a dark passage, at the end of which a faint stream of light issued from the crevices of a low door. Behind it was "Air Throne," and from thence a crisp cheerful sound, like the rippling of a little river, reached Emmie where she stood; a pleasant sound of two gay voices in continuous chatter, broken now by a musical laugh—Christabel's laugh, that was music itself—ringing from the low-roofed attic down the dark, cold passage, and warming Emmie's heart. Well that it was such a big house, and the attics far enough removed from the ground-floor for people to dare to laugh freely there without fear of being thought hard-hearted.

Looking down the balusters towards a lower story, she could see a half-opened door, from which another wider and brighter stream of light came. Emmie could

have wished that door were shut, for her father would pass it in going downstairs, and the lavish light would bring him a reminder that would not please him. That, however, was the "Land of Beulah," and Mrs. Urquhart, the kind-hearted old lady, who, with her son Dr. Urquhart, rented all the best rooms in the house, was too important a person to be dictated to as to when she should shut or open her drawing-room door. The door was left ajar because Dr. Urquhart had not yet returned from his afternoon round of visits to his patients, and his mother was listening for his ring at the bell. Emmie knew just how she looked as she sat listening, for she had lately shared the watch once or twice—not anxious, only pleasantly expectant—and she knew too how the comely old face would broaden into smiles of perfect content, when the quick, business-like knock and ring came, followed by a springy step on the stairs that all the household knew. The drawing-room door was always close shut after that for the rest of the evening; but though it shut in long spaces of silence, there was no gloom. Emmie could not continue the scene; but if she had been clairvoyante, and had watched the occupants of the "Land of Beulah" till bed-time, she would only have seen pictures that would have confirmed her pleasant thoughts of the place. The old mother nodding over her

parti-coloured knitting, when the cosy meal was over; the son with his books and papers and shaded reading-lamp at a table writing, covering his eyes to think a minute, and then rapidly dashing off a page or two with nervous fingers pressed on the pen, and knitted brow under the thick fair hair; aware, however, of every movement in the chair by the fire, and ready, when the signal came, to jump up, thrust his long fingers through his hair, clearing his brow of thought and frowns with the movement, and come forward to the fire for a comfortable half-hour's chat with his mother before she retired to bed. This was the crowning cup of pleasure in the tranquil days Mrs. Urquhart shared with her now prosperous son; days that were a sojourning in the "Land of Beulah" to her at the end of a stormy life, as she often told Emmie. It was talk that had no pain and not much excitement in it, over the happy events of each successful day, flavoured sometimes with a mild joke or two about the young lady-students upstairs, whom Dr. Urquhart came across sometimes in lecture-rooms, in whose company (he said) he felt puzzled as to whether he should treat them as comrades or as young ladies, and against whose possible designs on her son's heart Mrs. Urquhart, generous in everything else, watched jealously. Perhaps there would be a little sham quarrel

when Mrs. Urquhart would maliciously repeat some gossip about the Moores she had learned from Emmie, and Dr. Urquhart would pretend a great deal of excitement in defending them; all to be ended by a tenderer than usual good-night kiss.

Yes, there was pleasant talk from happy hearts in that room every evening, but the gay atmosphere never penetrated to the parlour just beneath, where Mr. and Mrs. West spent their evenings alone; she lying on the high-backed sofa by the wall, he seated upright on a chair beside her, their hands clasped together, not talking much, not often even looking at each other, but mutely interchanging pain, and lessening it perhaps by such silent partnership; she suffering only for him, he for himself chiefly, but also for all the others dependent upon him whom he had dragged down into what looked to him an abyss of shame and ruin. He was like a shipwrecked mariner on a raft in a wide sea—the sea of his own bitter thoughts—clinging to the one comrade who had courage to embark with him on its salt, desolate waves, but separated from all other help. Yet, if he could but have cleared his eyes from the mists of tears that pride would never let him weep away, he might have seen that the storms which to his thought had shattered his whole existence, had but carried off a few

useless spars and a little overcrowded canvas, and that all his real treasures were still preserved to him, and were lying unheeded at his feet.

Emmie stood leaning her arms on the balusters, and looking down into the hall, till she had seen her father recross it and shut himself up in the dining-room, and then she too ran lightly down. A thought had struck her while waiting which had changed her intention of going immediately to "Air Throne," to tell the story of the jewel-case to Katherine Moore. She must find out from Harry whether there was to his knowledge any fresh cause for the additional shade of misery she had read on her father's face, or whether it was only one of those chance thickenings of the fog of gloom in his mind, which they had learnt to expect as certainly, and endure as patiently, as January snow-storms, or east winds in March. Harry had come home as usual a quarter of an hour after Mr. West, and had made the most of the interval before dinner, while his father was upstairs, to bring the brightness no one could help feeling in his presence, to bear upon his mother; but when Emmie found him he had retreated to the little tea-room, once a butler's pantry, where noise being fortunately shut in by double doors, the younger members of the family were accustomed to congregate in the evening. Mr. West had

not been known to put his head inside the green-baize doors for years; and Mrs. West, since Dr. Urquhart had one day spoken gravely to her on the necessity of sparing herself fatigue, had paid it few visits. It was the spot which, according to Alma, had played an important part in turning Constance Rivers into Lady Forrest; but less fastidious and more imaginative persons might have seen a "Temple of Youth," or even an "Iduna's Grove," within the four dingily-papered walls, cumbered with faded furniture. It was the one place in the house where the naturally high spirits of the young Wests had free play, and managed to bubble up above the dull crust of care which extinguished them outside the sanctuary. Old Mary Anne, whose forty years of domestic service had left more poetry in her than three London seasons had left to Constance, was capable of disentangling the genius of the place from the moth-holes and weather-stains of the furniture, and used of evenings to steal up from her cleaning in desolate regions below, where hungry winds moaned through empty cellars and larders, to refresh herself by standing between the double doors, and listening to the gay racket of voices within. It sent her back to her cogitations as to how to dish up two mutton cutlets to look as if they were five with renewed courage, convinced that there were still members

of the West family worth cooking for, at reduced wages. Emmie closed the double doors quickly behind her, however, mindful of ears in the house that had a right to complain of hubbub; for as she had been longer absent from the juvenile party than usual, there was of course a great outcry to greet her reappearance—everybody speaking at the top of their voices and at once.

“Where have you been all the afternoon, Emmie? Have you heard about the row on the stairs when the boys came home at five o’clock? Casabianca and the Gentle Lamb would play at ‘tig’ on the stairs, thinking everybody was out, and they quarrelled and fought on the landing, till Casabianca knocked the Gentle Lamb right into the ‘Land of Beulah.’ Two old ladies were drinking tea with Mrs. Urquhart, and you should have seen their faces when the Gentle Lamb came rolling through, and fell with his head among the tea-cups.”

The speaker of the last sentence was Mildred West, a tall, energetic-looking girl of fourteen, somewhat given to domineering, and nicknamed Mildie by the rest of the family, in the exercise of a peculiar style of wit prevalent in Iduna’s Grove, which consisted in calling everything by the least appropriate name that could be

found for it. The fun of these names might not be apparent to outsiders, but they afforded great satisfaction to the young Wests, and were in fact the chief weapons by which they held the troubles of life at bay, and, so to speak, kept their heads above water; a new privation or grievance always seeming to lose its sting with these young people as soon as one of their number had invented a by-word to fling at it.

Emmie shook her head at the two offenders, who were now struggling for possession of the least rickety of the school-room chairs, and said to her sister :

“But what were you doing to let them fight on Mrs. Urquhart’s landing, Mildie?”

“My Physics,” said Mildie, loftily; “I was in the middle of a proposition; and I think with Katherine Moore, that a girl’s studies are too important for her to allow them to be interrupted by the folly of boys. Women are the students of the future, Katherine says, and I mean to do credit to my family, whatever becomes of the others.”

Of course this speech was a signal for a general onslaught of the boys on Mildie; but Harry, who did not seem quite in his usual spirits to-night, checked the skirmish peremptorily; and, while the rest of the party were taking their seats round the tea-table, Emmie found

the opportunity she wanted of drawing him aside to ask her question.

“Anything happened to-day?” she whispered.

“Bad—do you mean?”

“Oh, my dear Harry, of course I meant to papa; and does anything good ever happen to him—should I expect that?”

“The poor Governor,” said Harry, with a good deal more compassion in his voice than there had been in Emmie’s. “He certainly is unlucky, poor old chap; he always does contrive to get himself into every mess that’s going. If he could but stick to what he’s told to do, and not put his unlucky oar in where it’s not wanted, he might at least drudge on without being noticed, like the rest of us. But I suppose it is difficult for him to forget the time when he was one of the heads, and ordered as he liked, and to remember that he’s nothing in the new house but an old supernumerary clerk, kept on sufferance. It must be hard.”

“But has anything more than usual happened to-day to annoy him, do you suppose?”

“Mr. Cummins sent for him to his private room to speak about his having taken more upon himself than he ought in a business matter that came under his eye, and, of course, muddled it. Their voices got so loud—for you

know when the Governor's pride is thoroughly stung he can speak, and Cummins is an insolent brute—that a good deal was overheard in the clerks' room. I can tell you, Emmie, I sat trembling, for every minute I expected, and at last hoped, that the Governor would end the lecture he was getting by throwing up his place and mine, and vowing never to make a pen-stroke in the old hole again. I wonder how he helped it. I wonder how he ever swallowed his pride and rage, so as to get out of that room without a regular flare up; and how he bore to walk back to his place, with the other clerks staring at him. All of them young fellows like myself, except two superannuated old chaps, who began in grandpapa's time I believe, and who, like old idiots as they are, tried to show they pitied him. It was an awful time for us both I can tell you, I daren't so much as look at him, to see how he was taking it, but I could feel the desk we were both writing at tremble when he leaned upon it again and took up his pen. Poor old chap!"

"If he should quarrel with Mr. Cummins some day and throw up his post and yours, what would become of us?"

"I daresay I should get employment somewhere else; but wherever he went it would be the same story—the impossibility it is for him to act as a subordinate, and

his ill-luck. I am afraid he is not of much use where he is, and that though Cummins can't turn him out, for it was agreed he was to have a post in the office when the old firm was broken up, he is trying all he can to provoke him to resign."

"We should still have the house and the lodgers."

"The lease will be out the year after next."

"Poor mother," said Emmie, softly.

"Poor old Governor," said Harry, passing his hand quickly over his frank boyish eyes. "Well, he fought a good fight to-day, to hold back the words that would have made us all beggars; and if I can only keep a sharp look-out over him, and stop him from running off the lines again, things may never really be as bad as we are imagining. I believe the Governor would rather blow out his brains any day than stand Cummins' bullying: but he will bear a great deal for the mother and us; and I must keep my eyes about me, without his knowing it, and nip in the bud any fresh designs of his that won't hold water."

"I thought you said that Mr. Cummins was the new youngish partner, who had taken a liking to you, and who invited you to dine with him at his club one day?"

"Yes," said Harry, "and what do you think one of the clerks overheard him saying he did it for?—because,

though my father was an old dolt, and I something of a cub, I had a confoundedly pretty sister."

"What did he mean? *Me?* Oh, Harry!" cried Emmie, taking her hands from Harry's shoulders, where she had been resting them confidingly, and covering her face, while, in a minute, a dark flood of angry crimson glowed above the white finger-tips to the roots of her dark hair, and invaded the small lobes of the little ears that showed beneath its coils. "He meant me!"

Harry put his arm round her and drew her close to him, his face glowing too with a proud sense of brotherly protection and superior worldly wisdom.

"Why, Emmie, what signifies what a fool of a fellow like that says? I would not have repeated his idiotic words, if I thought you'd have cared a rush about them."

"To be talked about like that from one person to another," said Emmie, slowly uncovering her eyes, which to Harry's remorse had large bright tears in them. "I knew he looked at me in a horrid way that day—the day I went in a cab to fetch papa home, when poor little Willie was taken in his first fit; but I did not know he had talked about me."

"You are a fine little personage," said Harry, stooping down and kissing a tear from her cheek. "You're a nice little person to pretend to be a friend of Miss

Katherine Moore, who gets up and speaks in public meetings, and stands up for women's rights, if you can't bear to be talked about."

"It is the sort of talk," said Emmie. "I can't explain it, but no one would understand me better than Katherine Moore. It is the right to be spoken about and looked at in another way, whether one is rich, or poor, or handsome, or ugly, that she stands up for—for women. Never mind, dear Harry; don't be vexed with yourself. I won't think of it again; but you must allow that it is horrid to be looked at, as Mr. Cummins looked at me, just because one happens to have come out in a hurry with a shabby hat and dress on. I wonder how girls feel who never have such things to do, who, like Alma Rivers, have fathers they are proud of belonging to, whom everybody is forced to respect. The last time I was at a party at the Rivers's, Alma dropped her fan while she was dancing, and half-a-dozen people rushed to pick it up, and Mr. Anstice gave it back to her with a look—as if he thought she ought to be waited upon by people on their knees. It must make one feel very odd—that way of being looked at."

"Well," said Harry, "I don't suppose there's much chance of our poor old Governor ever holding up his head with Lord Justice Rivers again; but it would be hard

lines on him if his children had a grudge against him for that. Don't be down-hearted, Emmie; at all events, you've got a brother to stick up for you, and punch on the head anyone from this time forth who looks at you in a way you don't like. Christabel Moore has not even that."

"She is far above wanting any help," said Emmie enthusiastically; "and, Harry dear, I'm not so selfish or so silly as to wish you to quarrel with Mr. Cummins because he was rude to me. You must think of keeping things straight for papa's sake, and forget my little vexations. There, look, my face is all right again now. I can bear it. Papa has to bear being looked down on, and spoken to roughly every day, you say. I have not thought enough about that. I shall pity him more now when he comes in with a gloomy face, and grudge less the trouble mamma takes to keep home vexations from him. Do you know, Harry, she has made up her mind to sell her pearls?—the necklace and pendants she used to wear on company nights. I have the case in my pocket now, and I am going after tea to consult Katherine Moore about getting her jeweller to find out how much they are worth, and put us in the way of selling them. Do you remember how we used to take peeps at them in their case when we were children, and how lovely mamma looked when she had them on?"

“She don’t want pearls for that,” said Harry stoutly; “and as for you and Mildie, young ladies whose bosom friends study medicine and take to public speaking, are mountains high above caring for jewels, I suppose. But let us have a look before they go. It’s something to have had big pearls in the family, is it not?”

“Will you look at them here?” said Emmie, cautiously drawing a corner of the purple case from her pocket. “Can we trust Casabianca and the Gentle Lamb?”

“I’ll undertake them,” said Harry. “I think they ought to see mother’s pearls once. Now, children,” (raising his voice) “we are going to show you the family jewels; but if anyone of you comes too near, and so much as breathes upon them, under the table that one goes before he has time to wink, and stays there for the rest of the evening. Now, attention, and keep your places,” taking the case from Emmie, and touching the spring as he spoke.

Even Mildie condescended to be enthusiastically admiring, though she excused her interest on the plea that pearls were an abnormal product of nature, on whose natural history she was, on the smallest encouragement, willing to enlighten an ignorant public. The public, however, preferred ignorant wonder, and to expend its energy on a dance of triumph round the case.

“If Emmie would only come to church in ’em once,” suggested Casabianca (*alias* Aubrey West), who owed his sobriquet to his unlikeness to Mrs. Hemans’ martyr to obedience, “wouldn’t I bring Tom Winter there to see her; and would not he think small beer of all his own people after that!”

“Or she might wear them when she goes with us to the athletic sports next summer for all our fellows to see,” amended the Gentle Lamb. “Or, I say, Emmie, you might set them up as prizes for fellows to jump for, and I’d promise to win them back for you at long jump. Would not it be jolly fun?”

“You fool,” said Casabianca. “What would be the good of giving Tom Winter a chance of winning them, and bringing his sister to church in them instead of Emmie? You’ll let Tom Winter see you in ’em some day, won’t you, Emmie? He’ll never believe we’ve had such things in our family unless he sees you in them, however much I tell him.”

“What signifies Tom Winter,” put in Sidney, a bright-eyed boy of seven, Emmie’s secret pet, and favourite of the fry. “What signifies what he thinks of our sister? You are a great deal too good for him to look at, Emmie, even without the pearls. Now I advise you to put them on directly, and go upstairs and show

yourself in them to Dr. Urquhart. He has promised to give me a microscope, so you'd better please him all you can."

This suggestion brought such a return of flush to Emmie's scarcely cooled cheeks, that Harry would have rewarded the speaker with a seat under the table, if Mildie had not luckily struck in with a proposition that pleased everybody. Why should not Emmie put on the pearls for them all to see, and wear them through the evening, just to familiarise the younger ones with the spectacle of the family grandeur, which would otherwise never be anything but a tradition to them. Let them at least be able to think they knew how mamma had looked in the days of which old Mary Anne told them so many stories. Emmie, though she had been sharing her mother's sorrows with full sympathy all the afternoon, and weeping over her father's and her own a minute ago, had light-heartedness enough left in her to yield to the general wish without much pressing. She had often wondered how the cold smooth stones would feel on her neck, and how the milk-white band of mingled pearls and diamonds would show among her dark braids just above her forehead;—would she look dignified like Alma in them—the sort of person to be approached with distant admiration, such as she had seen in Mr. Anstice's eyes?

This evening was the last chance of having her curiosity set at rest, and as the gas was still burning in the dressing-room her father had lately left, it would only take her a minute to discover what sort of a new Emmie would look out of the depths of the great mirror, which her mother had only retained, because old Mrs. Urquhart preferred putting on her cap before a less pretentious looking-glass. She ran lightly upstairs, and after a little preliminary arrangement of her everyday evening-dress, so as to leave a portion of her white neck and arms clear for the pearls to rest on, she took the jewels from their case, with almost trembling fingers, and clasped the necklace round her slim throat. It fell low on her neck, and how lustrous the milk-white stones showed there, rising and falling with her quick breath, like flecks of moonlight on a blown drift of snow! The bracelets were hard to manage, for they would keep falling over her hands; but the head-band fitted exactly, and looked just as it used to look long ago on Mrs. West's head—a pale pure halo crowning the dusky night of hair, and giving a sort of soft dignity to the smiling face beneath it. Emmie did not think such words, or any like them; but as she stepped backwards, and looked at the reflection in the mirror, she was certainly not displeased with what she saw. It was not Alma—it was only Emmie after all—

but still an Emmie who might wear the traditional family pearls for one night in the sight of the boys, and perhaps of Katherine and Christabel Moore, without disgracing them. It was too late to go up to "Air Throne" now, and introduce the jewels in this guise to the friend whose aid in selling them was to be asked. She must wait to settle that business till the Moores came back from giving their evening lessons; but as Emmie descended the stairs she thought of a person who had a right to a farewell inspection of these relics of past grandeur, if love of them, and pride in them, counted for anything. Old Mary Anne would be sure to discover or guess the new abstraction from her mistress's jewel-box, by its effect on the weekly expenditure, and there was wisdom in stopping her mouth from remonstrance, by appearing to take her into their counsels beforehand. Besides, she had been particularly gracious towards the attic lodgers lately, and deserved the confidence that she valued more than wages.

With this design in her mind, Emmie passed the green-baize door, without opening it, and descended to the basement story. The air of its wide passages, always clear and cold, made her shiver, but they were less dark than usual; someone had turned on the gas-jet at the foot of the staircase, and Mary Anne was standing under-

neath it talking to a black-coated figure, that, at the sound of Emmie's step, turned round and came forward to meet her. It was Dr. Urquhart. He did not look surprised at the apparition of a figure so adorned on the kitchen-stairs, as a person less intent on the business in hand might; he came quickly to her and spoke at once :

“Miss West! how fortunate! you are the person I am seeking. I am sorry to tell you that one of the young ladies who lives upstairs has been knocked down at the corner of a street close by, and is, I fear, seriously hurt. She was taken into a shop near, and I was sent for, and finding she could be moved, I am having her brought home. Your mother must be warned, however, of what has happened before the commotion of carrying her through the hall begins. I hurried in first to get hold of you. Now, can you go in and tell your mother at once, without startling her, or shall I do it?”

Emmie turned very white at the first word, and her voice shook as she said :

“One of the Moores! Oh! not Katherine?”

“It is the elder of the two ladies; but, Miss West, you must not faint, if you please. There is a great deal for everyone to do, and your mother must be thought of.”

Emmie was not in danger of fainting; accidents were too rife among the boys for her nerves not to be case-hardened; but if she had had any disposition to give way, these words, and the smile that accompanied them, encouraging but peremptory, would have acted as a tonic.

“I think I had better go to mamma,” she said. “If she sees you unexpectedly, she will fancy at once that something has happened to one of the boys.”

“Right—she is easily alarmed, and ought not to be allowed to agitate herself. Go into the dining-room first, and prepare her with a word or two, and I will follow and explain the arrangements it is necessary to make at once.”

As they passed the green-baize door, Emmie said:

“I must look in here for a minute, and tell Harry to keep the children quiet, or they will wonder what has become of me, and all rush out into the hall.”

She left the door open during her brief talk with Harry at the tea-table, and when she came back, she saw that Dr. Urquhart’s sensible grey eyes were fixed upon her with an expression in them she had never seen there before, as if he had just made some discovery about her which put the prominent thought of the moment out of his head.

It startled her back into a recollection of what she had been doing before the news of the accident came, and as she raised her hand to the jewels in her hair, she could not keep back an exclamation of dismay.

“Oh! Dr. Urquhart, what am I to do? I dressed myself up in these things to please the children, and I dare not go into the dining-room as I am now—it would make papa so angry.”

“Would it indeed? How long will it take you to put them off?”

“About two minutes.”

Dr. Urquhart took out his watch.

“I can give you two minutes,” he said; “there will still be time for what we have to do; but you must not be longer.”

Emmie ran breathlessly upstairs, and Dr. Urquhart returned his watch to his pocket and stood looking after her. Sidney, who had crept to the door to learn as much as possible of what was going on, observed him closely for a second or two, and then went back to his seat, and announced the result of his investigation to his brothers.

“Well,” he said, “I told you that Dr. Urquhart would like to see Emmie with the pearls on, and I was quite right—he did like it.”

CHAPTER IV.

AIR THRONE.

Heaven hath its crown of stars, the earth
Her glory robe of flowers—
The sea its gems—the grand old woods
Their songs and greening showers :
The birds have homes, where leaves and blooms
In beauty wreathe above ;
High yearning hearts, their rainbow dream—
And we, sweet ! we have love.

GERALD MASSEY.

THE house that Mr. West held on a long lease, though situated in a part of London long since deserted by the tide of fashion, had had its day of splendour, and was built in a solid generous fashion, liberal of space and of inside decoration, which does not prevail in modern buildings. Even the rooms under the roof showed signs of careful finish, and had possibilities of being made comfortable and even picturesque, which caused Katherine and Christabel Moore to congratulate themselves nearly every day on the good luck which had timed their arrival in London, to the crisis when Mrs. West, the only person to

whom they had a letter of introduction, was looking out for occupants for her unused upper rooms. It was a step towards the realisation of the hopes that had brought them, unknown, unprotected, and young, to fight for the means of existence in the very spot where the struggle is hottest, that they could hardly have expected to gain so easily. Katherine was glad to be able to write to the few friends, who had not thrown them off in disgust at their rashness and Utopian views of life, that she and her sister were living under the roof of a lady known to their mother in past days. It made the remonstrances that had been addressed to her, on the dangers to which her independent modes of action might expose her sister, less disagreeable to remember. Christabel used to look over her sister's shoulder as she wrote this announcement, and profess to be a little scandalised at her finding any satisfaction in throwing such a sop as this to the Mrs. Grundies they had left behind them. If they had determined to be independent of conventional restraints, and to trust for protection to their own upright wills and strong resolution to carve out worthy careers for themselves, why should they have recourse to pretences like this, and make concessions to other people's scruples, which had in them, at least, a flavour of distrust in their own theories? Christabel would peer down saucily as she

spoke into Katherine's quiet, strong face, which looked so incapable of pretences or concessions, that it was a sort of joke to accuse her of them ; and Katherine would reply, with an answering glance of fond admiring love, whose presence would explain even greater inconsistencies in a feminine adventurer on new paths. It might be all very well to burn one's boats, and cut off all retreat to the old country if one started on the journey of exploration alone, but when there was another by one's side, whose fate was a million times more momentous, then——: no ! Katherine never could bring herself to say she was not thankful to have the ægis of Mrs. West's respectability thrown over their enterprises. Even when she was indulging in her most soaring day-dream of the future triumph of what she called "her cause," foolish, nervous Mrs. West's motherliness would recur to her memory, as a sort of stronghold in the background, into which Christabel at least might always run and be safe from slanderous tongues.

That *arrière-pensée*, even more than their other recommendations, made the low-roofed attics a really home-like place to Katherine, and sent her out from them to the arduous struggle of her student life, and to the teaching that filled up its spare hours, with a courage that had known no check as yet.

It was no easy life the orphan sisters led together there ; but they had known so much worse things than toil and privation, that these came to them almost in the guise of interesting new acquaintance, and were met with a gay defiant welcome that forced them to put on their least repellent looks. What hardship was there in sitting down to bread-and-tea meals which their own labour had paid for, to people who were used to eating sumptuous meals made bitter by taunts of dependence, or cold, silent tokens of antagonism and dislike? Christabel, whose ardent, imaginative character had suffered most in the atmosphere of suppression from which they had escaped, and who, being the younger by some years, did not share Katherine's feelings of responsibility, found such delight in the mere fact of their freedom that her spirits were always ready to bubble up under the weight of a privation or toil, and lift it to the height of a pleasure, or a welcome experience at least. Weariness might come by-and-by, but she was so far from it yet, that there was even energy left to seek out difficulties and obstacles for the mere joy of overcoming them and proving her strength. Mr. Carlyle, in his essay on Jean Paul Richter, excuses the German poet's defiance of public opinion in his celebrated "clothes' controversy," by pointing out that a youthful disposition to be combative in unimportant matters while

a great life-struggle is also going on, shows a reserved fund of energy which leads one to augur well for the chance of victory in the serious endeavour. Dare any of Christabel's female friends have so augured from her indulgence in little vagaries of taste in dress, or from her small defiances of public opinion in minor social questions, seeing nothing in these mutinies but the overflowing bravery of a strong spirit on its way to success, or must they have looked grave, considering that the path of a woman who aims at making an independent career for herself is already too difficult for it to be safe for her to plant a needless thorn upon it?

The sisters, who had formerly scarcely ever known what it was to be an hour apart, were now separated during the greater part of each day, by having to carry on their different sorts of work in different places; but this circumstance only made the reunion that came in the evening an ever-recurring love-feast that lost nothing of its gladness by being constantly repeated. Katherine's eyes were always just as hungry for the sight of Christabel's face as on the evening when she had returned to the attic after her first day's study, and found her sister at home before her, and Christabel was never less eager to pour out the history of the day's doings into Katherine's ears. The talk and the love-making they had been used

to spread over the whole day had all to be crowded into a few evening hours now ; no wonder the sound of their voices came like a rippling river from Air Throne, when Emmie West stood and listened outside. Christabel's outpouring of talk generally came first. She said a little about what she had done and seen during the day ; and then a great deal about what had been transacted in that inner world of imagination which was to her the most real world she knew. Katherine followed her sympathetically through both narratives—first, through the little outer court of actual experience, where the figures were often somewhat dull and pale, as not having had power to force an impression of themselves through the dream-halo in which Christabel walked, then passing as it were through a curtain into the theatre, where as yet all the most moving events of Christabel's life had been transacted—the brightly-lighted, gaily-coloured drama of her thoughts and dreams. The dream-people who performed there were so much the most congenial companions the sisters had, that to Katherine as much as to Christabel it was a coming home to rest, after work among strangers.

When a day in dreamland had been well lived through, Katherine's time to tell her experience came. Her separate life had only its outer court that could be talked about ; but it was a very different sort of outer court from

Christabel's. Very real and distinctly seen, if in some respects strange and different from her expectations. Her daily story of hard unaided work, of hindrances obtrusively thrust in the way, of snubs and slights meeting her at every step in her enterprise, was always told shortly, in plain words, without a tinge of bitterness in them. She could not afford to let herself speak bitterly ; it would have cost too much of the force she had to husband for each day's struggle. It was only when something of a contrary nature had to be related—when some unexpected word of encouragement had come her way, when some hand in authority had been held out to help her up, instead of to push her down, or when some service had been rendered by a fellow-student in such a way as neither to wound her feminine susceptibility nor hurt her independence ; it was only on the rare occasions when things of this kind came into the day's history, that her voice warmed up, and her lip trembled, and her eyes, fixed on Christabel's face, took a depth of feeling, which told Christabel how far into the proud sensitive heart the usual experience of contempt and coldness cut down.

A short silence would sometimes follow on the end of Katherine's story. The two sisters would sit hand-in-hand leaning against each other, Katherine's soft dusky braids touching Christabel's rich auburn, the two hearts

beating to the same tune, for they were thinking of each other. It was the gravest moment of their day. The pause after hard work and after the joy of meeting again, when anxious thoughts and doubts, if any were at hand, knocked at the door. Christabel would soon escape from them back into her dream-world; but Katherine often had a hard struggle to wrench herself away from what she felt were disabling forebodings, cowardly lookings back, to a past from which they had cut themselves off. Yet the question would come, had she done right to bring Christabel here with her? If she should fail, and for all her toils and struggles, reap only the blame of having tried to thrust herself where she was not wanted; if she did not prove herself stronger than all the strong prejudices arrayed against her; if she had to fall back beaten in the hard battle she had entered on, what retreat was left to them? The old sphere would not open again to receive them, or if it would, their position in it had been hard before, but would be intolerable when they went back with the disgrace and ridicule of such an attempt and such a failure fixed upon them. She could bear anything for herself, but Christabel was such a rare treasure to guard; so bright and tender to those who loved her—such an enigma to all others; so rich in gifts that yet needed tender encouragement to give them fair play; such an enthusiast

for work and for high thoughts, and after all such a dreamer. Katherine's arm would tighten its hold on her sister's waist as her thoughts reached some such point; and Christabel, startled out of a fancy that had taken her worlds away, would look up suddenly into her sister's face, with surprised wide-open blue eyes, bright and yet misty, and the far-off sweet look in them which comes from habitually dwelling on distances invisible to ordinary eyes.

A change of place for these evening talks, from the neighbourhood of the wide-hobbed fireplace to the window-seat of the low attic window, was the principal event by which the sisters marked the passing of the seasons in their present life, too full of work to be monotonous, and yet having few breaks in it.

The first months of their freedom—their hardest and loneliest, and yet perhaps their gayest time—had been fire-side months, when the hearth-rug (a dingy black and gray one, knitted from strips of cloth by some West of a past generation) had been Christabel's throne for the greater part of the evening, and when Katherine's household thoughts had turned chiefly on schemes for bringing her medical books and her papers to the draughty end of the table, and leaving the cosiest nooks for Christabel's easel and the embroidery frame, to which she gave an hour or

two every night. The lengthening days, when there had been light but not warmth far into the evening, had not been an improvement; and then, quite suddenly, as it seemed, there had come a time when the low-roofed attics had turned into furnaces filled with lifeless air, and the hour for comfortable talk had to be put off almost till bedtime; then at last, weary with the long hot day, they would sit by the open window and watch the crimson in the west die out into a uniform pearly grey over miles and miles of monotonous roof-lines, down to a distance where the dome of St. Paul's lifted itself, round and perfect, into the empty evening sky. The pain and the pleasure of that time, too, had passed, and now here they were again, with the shiny black bars of the grate for their evening prospect. What had been their gains and losses since Christabel, on the first day of their taking possession of the rooms, had exercised her ingenuity in turning every bit of carving into a picture illustrative of the rapid development of the fortune they had come to seek? They had been discussing the question together when Emmie heard their voices, as she stood at the head of the stairs, and Christabel's laugh testified that the retrospect had not saddened them. While she could laugh—such a gay, free-hearted laugh, too—all must be well with Katherine; well with her heart, at least; for Katherine was too far-sighted not to be subject to

twinges of mental anxiety, even when filled with present heart-content.

Even now, when she got up, with the echo of Christabel's happy laughter still in her ears, she felt only half-satisfied with their late outpouring of confidence, and wished she could have penetrated deeper than words could reveal, and read the yet unformed thoughts, the hopes and purposes to come, whose seeds lay in her sister's soul. Would the time ever arrive when she would begin to be "sick of shadows," and take to looking at life as it really was, and if so, in what guise would the awakening come? Would some new influence dawn in her life strong enough to merge her two worlds into one, and force her to act and suffer among realities with the same intensity with which she was now dreaming them all in her own way? Katherine knew of only one influence that was likely to do for Christabel what the mere friction of everyday experience was rapidly doing for herself, and it was an influence which, when they began to live their independent life, and put themselves out of the way of being sought by their equals, they had decided must never come near them. Christabel had better go on dreaming to old age, Katherine thought, than come out into the daylight of reality through that door. She paused with an armful of anatomical drawings—her last night's work—which she was going to put away

on a high shelf, to comfort herself with a reassuring study of her sister's face. Christabel was lying at full length on the hearth-rug, spreading out the long skirt of her serge dress, cut after some artistic design, more pleasant to the eye than convenient to the pedestrian, to dry by the fire; for the same purpose she had let down her thick hair, which the small hat she wore had badly protected from mist and rain; and she was now propping herself on her elbows, and resting her face upon the palms of her hands, as she read a book open before her.

“Luckily,” Katherine thought, “it was a face that could easily pass in and out among crowds without attracting many eyes to it—

*Pâle et pourtant rose,
Petite avec grands yeux.”*

There was that in the soft outlines and dim colouring which gave an effect of remoteness, as of something dropped into a place to which it did not belong; a lack of responsiveness in feature and expression that would deaden most people's interest rather than provoke it. Nobody but Katherine ever saw the sleeping beauty in the face wake up; to all others it was shrouded, shut out from their seeing as completely as Christabel's soul was cut off from ordinary contact by her dreams. Well,

it was best so. Katherine satisfied herself that this year had not brought a hair's-breadth of change; even the rose hue under the fair skin was not faded by toil or privation; there was not a line of care on the broad low brow or round the dreamy mouth; the delicate chin propped between the two hands had not sharpened in outline. It would be difficult to point out the lightest sign of the passage of another year over that fair drooping head. Does living among dreams make one, so long as it lasts, fadeless, like them?

"Listen, Katherine," Christabel said suddenly, looking up from her book; "it is Pascal speaking of imagination: 'Ce pouvoir énorme; l'ennemi éternel de la raison, qui se plaît à étaler son empire en l'amenant dessous ses pieds, a crée dans l'homme une seconde nature. Il a ses joies, ses douleurs, sa santé, son malâise, ses richesses, sa pauvreté. Il arrête l'empire des sens, et encore il leur fait part d'une pénétration artificielle.' "

"Are you looking out passages from Pascal to read with old David Maevie?" Katherine asked. "Is not that travelling rather fast?"

"Plums," said Christabel. "Of course it won't be much of a French lesson; but we have drudged on at the grammar so many evenings lately that I think I may give him a treat. It will be great fun for me, too, to see and hear.

I wish you could be with us. He will read the paragraph through first in his good solid Scotch-French, then I shall give him the English of a word or two he will not have understood, and gradually the full meaning of the passage will dawn upon him, and he will begin to knit and unknit the wrinkles about his forehead till his face spreads out into a blaze of comprehension and delight; the spectacles will come off then, and he will fold his hands on the book, and we shall talk about imagination, 'its joys, its griefs, its sickness, its health,' till one of the hundred and odd clocks on the walls of the back shop tells us that the lesson has lasted two hours instead of one. Then I shall have to quarrel with him about not taking my usual fee, the half-crown that always lies ready, neatly folded up in paper, in the broken Sèvres china tea-cup on the chimney-piece, and that he generally slips into my hand as I take leave, with a look of deferential apology that will some day, I am afraid, oblige me to kiss him. I should have done it before now if he did not take snuff and eat onion porridge for supper always just before I come in."

"To think of old David Macvie being the only intimate friend we have made, out of this house, during our year in London! Aunt Fletcher would have spared some of her warnings if she could have foreseen how little dangerous our acquaintance would be. We might

just as well have stumbled upon him, his old clocks and watches, his cases of butterflies, and his semi-scientific, semi-mystical talk in a little shop in a back street in Chester."

"But I should not have given him French lessons at half-a-crown an hour, if we had found him when we were living with Aunt Fletcher; and, above all, he would not, under those circumstances, have led us into the one adventure that Aunt Fletcher could reasonably profess to be horrified at, that has befallen us since we came here. I mean our going with him to that meeting, and your getting up to speak. It was all over in such a few minutes that I can still hardly believe it happened; but I did admire your courage, Katherine."

"I felt so like a hypocrite while sitting still," said Katherine, thoughtfully. "It made all my professions unreal, if when the occasion came and I found myself among people who seemed to be seeking after remedies for evils of which I thought I knew the cures, and seeking them in a wrong direction, I could not get up simply and tell them what I thought. I was not courageous, for I had no idea that what I said would rouse such opposition and dislike."

"Had not you! I knew it by instinct. I could not look round on the faces about us without being sure that

the kind of things you would say would surely give offence. I felt it in the air."

"And generally I know so much more of what is going on than you do."

"Ah, yes; but you see it has two sides to it, this imagination, as David and I shall prove by a thousand instances to each other directly. 'It arrests the exercise of the senses, and again it gives them an artificial power.' One never can tell how it will serve one, 'its riches, its poverty.' However, there was one man in the room who understood you. I saw that before he got up to speak, and how well he spoke, like a regular trained orator; and what a pleasant winning face and manner his was. David thinks that between you, you and he, you made an impression on the meeting; and if you had not spoken he would never have taken up the cudgels in your defence."

"A curious momentary partnership of two unknown people who found themselves thinking alike in an adverse crowd. I think these flashes of sympathy do one good; if there are only points here and there to catch the electric light it will travel on, and their being far apart does not so much signify. I am glad David thinks I did no harm."

"He simply glories in you; but I doubt if you have

not fallen in someone else's esteem in the exact proportion in which you have risen in his. I put Emmie West on to telling the tale to old Mrs. Urquhart this morning, just from my goodnatured impulse to let everybody have plums to their taste, and is not she enjoying the delight of passing on the scandal to the Gresham Lecturer this instant? What a pity it is that we are not *clairvoyantes*, and cannot see and hear. I really think it will be worth a free admission to the lectures for you. Mrs. Urquhart will look upon it as a shield to secure her son's heart against the possibility of damage from you for ever afterwards, and she will withdraw her objections to his taking you under his professional wing, and fighting some of your battles for you, as I really think he is half disposed to do."

"Poor old lady; she would be much happier if she could set her fears at rest, and give her benevolence free play. Coming upstairs after you to-night, I caught sight of her face as we passed her open door in our wet cloaks, and the conflict on it was quite comic. She longed to ask us in to get warm by her fire till our own had burned up, but could not make up her mind to expose her son to the danger of intimacy with adventuresses like ourselves. If she only knew how safe he was, she would sleep better of nights."

“There, you are mistaken, Kitty ; there, my imaginative insight carries me farther than yours. It would not at all conduce to Mrs. Urquhart’s repose to believe that her son was quite safe from anyone’s admiration ; it would puzzle her so she would lie awake wondering what kind of a heart it was that could be indifferent to winning her treasure, and perhaps begin at last to lay schemes for conquering it. Think, Kitty, of your coming, some years hence, when you are over thirty, and have taken your doctor’s diploma, to be courted by Mrs. Urquhart for her son ! Shall we not feel that we have slain prejudice, and trampled our enemies under our feet, then ?”

The sisters enjoyed a hearty laugh together at this notion ; and then Katherine felt Christabel’s skirts, and gave her leave to get up from before the fire, and prepare for their evening expedition to a house, a few streets distant, where they had each a lesson to give. They crept softly down the back stairs, not to remind Mr. West unnecessarily of the presence of lodgers in the house ; but as they passed the green-baize door, Katherine paused an instant, and drew Christabel’s attention with a smile to the clatter of gay young voices that was going on within.

“If we had been members of a large family, and had

had brothers," she said, as soon as they were out in the fog, and she had drawn Christabel's hand underneath her arm, "I wonder what difference it would have made in our destinies—whether we should have been strong enough to act independently of them, according to our own ideas, or whether we should have been hampered? Can you imagine the difference it would have made in our lives, at Aunt Fletcher's, if we had had a bright, energetic brother, like Harry West, coming to the house once or twice a year to make much of us? Which side would he have taken, when the great question of what we were to do with ourselves came up?"

"That would have depended on the sort of brain he had, and it is hardly likely that there should have been another in the family equal to yours, Kitty; probably he would have thought it incumbent on his manhood to side with Aunt Fletcher, and use all the power he would have had over us to condemn us to worsted work, mild visiting, and perpetual snubbing for all the vigorous years of our lives. I think we may be thankful that so little of the masculine element came into our lot. We found Aunt Fletcher hard enough to deal with, and she is only a woman like ourselves."

"Only a woman!" said Katherine, giving the little hand on her arm a squeeze against her heart. "What

an admission from you! How pleased Aunt Fletcher would be if she could hear you saying that.”

“And don’t you think she would be pleased if she could see us to-night turning out in the wind and the rain at eight o’clock to make our way to a dingy old shop in a back street, where you will climb up three pairs of dirty stairs to give a lesson in mathematics to a consumptive young Jew, and I shall teach an old Scotch optician to read French badly at half-a-crown an hour? Only think, we might have been seated in a warm, well-lighted drawing-room at this moment, nursing Aunt Fletcher’s two fat King Charleses in our laps, and with nothing on earth to do but make conversation about the weather, and get snubbed for our pains. I say, Kitty, does not London mud smell sweet—and don’t you breathe freely in the fog—and would not you like to jump lamp-post high for joy that we are safe in it?”

Christabel turned her head towards the lamp-post under which they were passing as she spoke, and its light fell for that instant on a sparkling, mischievous face, in which all the latent beauty was awake and looking out. The momentary illumination electrified two passers-by, who had chanced to be near enough to catch the last words, and who had turned with amused surprise to look at the speaker, but it was lost on

Katherine, whose eyes were fixed on a distant spot in the badly-lighted street.

“Stay,” she said, “is not that a woman’s voice calling for help? The sound comes from that little group of people down there by the railway-bridge. I am afraid something is going on that ought not to be. Ah! again; yes, it is certainly a woman’s voice calling for help.”

“Let us hurry on and see if we can be of any use.”

“If you were not here.”

“Am I a Pharisee, pray, to pass by on the other side? Why, Kitty, what did we break away from the drawing-room atmosphere for, if not to protest against there being any such words as ‘if you were not here’ applied to ourselves to make us hindrances instead of helps when work is to be done? Let us hasten. I won’t be made an ‘if you were not here’ to hinder you from acting.”

They pressed forward towards a corner of the road where the arch of a railway-bridge cast a shadow so deep as to swallow up the red glare from the windows of a gin-shop in its neighbourhood. A group of two or three were hanging about in the shade, but no crowd had gathered as yet; drunken rows on that spot were occurrences of too ordinary a nature to attract much notice, and as the sisters left the pavement they could distinguish a pair standing close together, at whom the stragglers

were idly staring. A ragged, hatless man, holding a woman fiercely by the shoulder, and pressing her up against the wall of the bridge where the shadow was deepest.

“He has struck her again ; he’s a desperate bad ’un, he is,” one of the lookers-on was saying to another, in a half-indifferent, half-frightened voice, as Katherine passed between them. She did not pause to ask any questions, but, pushing her way through the bystanders, walked straight up to the scene of action and laid her white gloveless hand on the ruffian’s arm. She was shabbily enough dressed not to attract much attention among such bystanders as these, even when taking the unusual course of interfering between a drunken ruffian and a woman whom he had presumably the right to ill-use. She was putting herself in danger of life or limb, no doubt, but then, perhaps she was a Bible-woman, whose business it was, or somebody queer who had better be left to her own devices.

The Don Quixotes of the present day have at least the advantage of not attracting so much attention as their prototype, for however extravagant their enterprises may be, they keep as much as possible to ordinary appearances, and do not arm themselves for their frays so much as with a dented copper shield, or a lame Rosinante to lift them above the heads of the crowd.

CHAPTER V.

A SUDDEN SMILE.

For ever, Fortune, wilt thou prove
An unrelenting foe to Love,
And when we meet a mutual heart.
Come in between and bid us part.

LONDON in November ought to be peopled with lovers, for there is nothing that can make a person really indifferent to the depressing effect of an atmosphere of condensed gloom but the carrying about with him the curious exaltation of brain and happy or unhappy unrest of heart which belong exclusively to the condition commonly called being in love. It may be agony, or it may be ecstasy, but it is a specific against caring for the weather all the same. Wynyard Anstice reaped the benefit of this immunity the day after his interview with Alma, and went about his business in the fog and rain with such perfect unconsciousness of the state of the atmosphere that it was well nothing better was wasted upon him. He was not exactly preoccupied, he went through his day's work just as

usual, took notes of an intricate case in a law-court with even greater apprehension of the bearing of the evidence than ordinarily came to him; chatted with some friends, and threw out suggestions for an article in a journal to which he and they contributed, with more than his usual vivacity and readiness. No one who came near him had the slightest reason to complain of absence of mind in him, but they would have been very much surprised if they could have looked through the surface thoughts and words, which all matched quite well with the things they were busied about, to the under consciousness that lay beneath, and in some strange way vivified and glorified all. He would have been astonished himself, for this consciousness of Alma which accompanied him all day, wiping out the fog from the sky and filling noisy law-courts and dusty newspaper offices with a curious vividness of life and interest not naturally belonging to them, was something too airy to be put into words, or even into those full-born thoughts already half-clothed with words, which throng the outer courts of the mind. It made itself known through the busy hours only as a luminous presence waiting outside a secret door of the soul, to be let in by-and-by, and meanwhile illuminating the whole house by the rays that streamed through the chinks and fell everywhere.

There was a little impatience, perhaps, as the day wore on, for the hour to come when the secret door might be opened, yet when at length Wynyard had parted from his last client and was on his way home, a strange reluctance to enter upon the pleasure he had been promising himself all day came over him. Through his cold, rainy walk to his chambers he kept himself warm, not by thinking on the subject that had been keeping his heart beating to a quicker tune all day, but by planning how he would soon allow himself to begin to think about it. How by-and-by, when he was quite alone, he would open that door in his memory and let Alma come through, and again hear her say every word she had said last night, and see for an instant the quick rain of tears veil the dearest and loveliest face in the world, and feel over again the strong pain and joy the shock of that sight had given him: yes, and find out all the meaning there was in it, and count all the good reasons for continuing to love her that might be wrung out of her kind looks and her indifferent words, and the warm, true tears that could only have sprung from a loving woman's heart. Perhaps it was that part of the prospect which had sown the seeds of reluctance amid his eagerness; a little cold dread threatened to kill all his delight, lest a second, or a third, or a thousandth's going over of what

had passed should point to the conclusion that nothing new had happened, and that Alma's looks and words and display of feeling had nothing essentially different in them from what he had seen often, and as often been disappointed in, when the immediate charm of presence had been removed by a little space of time. Never mind, last evening had at all events been a turning-point; he had resolved to hope, and his determination should remain, however little he could justify it to his reason. Had he not been experiencing all day what a difference to his daily drudging this permission to hope made? The question brought him to the door of his abode and occupied his thoughts while he shook the wet from his umbrella and mounted two flights of stairs to the floor where his chambers lay. He was a popular man, whose friendships and acquaintances branched up and down into various grades of society, and he had had quite a fight to evade invitations that would have given him the choice of several oddly different occupations for his evening. He almost felt as if he had broken away from all his acquaintance to keep an appointment with Alma, and that when he entered his room he should find her seated in one of his two armchairs by the fire, ready to talk to him. His first glance round the place brought a startling half-realisation of his fancy. The gas was burning brightly,

the table was spread, with signs of someone having lately made a meal there, and the most comfortable of the arm-chairs was wheeled just in front of the fire, with its back to the door, so that nothing was seen of its occupant but a head of light hair above its high back. Wynyard stood staring for a minute like a person in a dream, and then burst out laughing, while a young man leisurely picked himself up from the depths of the chair, where he had ensconced himself, and came forward, showing a face and figure that had just so much likeness to Wynyard's as would have made a stranger set him down at first sight for a younger brother.

“You expected to see me, old fellow, didn't you?” he said, holding out his hand.

“When I perceived that someone had eaten up my dinner, of course I did. The empty table was enough to make me think of you, as it used at Eton when I came in from cricket and found all my bread and butter devoured; I knew you had been there.”

“Well, I had nothing else to do, and I was hungry; so when your old Mrs. Gamp looked in and began to poke about, I told her I thought she had better bring in the dinner at once, and I'd keep it hot for you.”

“Which you appear to have done admirably in old Eton fashion.”

“Not so bad; there is a bit of juicy steak and a hot

potato down by the fire, and I sent out for a second pot of porter, which you'd never have thought of doing for me."

"You would always have taken care of yourself first."

"Come, now, don't be crusty, and make a fellow out to be more selfish than he knows he is. Sit still, if you are tired, and I'll fag for you; it won't be the first time by a hundred. You shall have your dinner before you in a minute, hot, and a steak that is worth eating, I can tell you; a great deal better than anything I ever get now."

"Except when you steal it, you deeply-to-be-pitied martyr to State dinners."

"Well, sit down; I've a lot of things to tell you that you'll like to hear; but get your dinner first, and then we'll talk. I don't believe you have half such a tiring life after all as mine. You look as fresh as possible, and when I got here after hunting about after you all day I was so done up, with the beastly weather and all, that if it had not been for the beefsteak and porter coming handy, you might have found a corpse on the hearthrug, and had to stand a trial for conspiring with Sairey Gamp to murder your cousin. To hear of my demise, by the way, would be nuts to somebody in Eccleston Square, and lead up—in how short a time, I wonder?—to another wedding-breakfast there."

"I dislike that kind of nonsense," said Wynyard, so sharply that Lord Anstice, who was lifting the hot dish

from before the fire, put it down again with a clatter, to shrug his shoulders.

“So bad as that, is it?” he exclaimed. “Well, I am warned; I won’t approach that topic again, unless with a face a yard long. But there, now, eat; and if that steak don’t put you into a good enough humour to talk about anything, I should say your case was a very serious one, indeed.”

While Wynyard eat his dinner his companion half-turned his chair from the fire, and with his legs thrown commodiously over one arm, sat sideways, watching him with a lazy, good-humoured sort of interest in the meal, such as a child shows who finds relief from the trouble of entertaining himself by watching his elders, and feels rather honoured in being allowed to do so.

The likeness between the cousins, though most apparent at first sight, remained strong even in the opinion of those friends who knew every change of the two countenances. In fact the constant pleasant variety of expression was the point their faces had most markedly in common, and it required a careful student of face-lore to detect the different qualities of the smiles and quick looks of intelligence and sudden glooms of annoyance or pain that made each countenance like an open landscape on a day of cloud and sunshine. A changeful show, very

agreeable to look upon. It was easier to see that the younger face was the handsomer of the two, being in fact singularly handsome, and to overlook that what it gained in symmetry of feature it lost in moral strength and intellectual power. Just at that moment the look of listless discontent which usually lurked about the well-shaped mouth and drooping thick-fringed eyelids was absent, but the tone of voice in which the younger man's next remark was made showed an approaching relapse into the prevailing mood.

"I should say you lead a very jolly sort of life here by yourself, with very little to trouble or bother you."

"Except my work," answered Wynyard dryly, "which, if I remember right, you considered something of a trouble when you attempted it."

"Attempted it, precisely; but then I never did it; I never got any work to do, and I could not have done it if I had. I was not saying that I should lead a jolly sort of life here, but that you do."

"Never mind me; let me alone. How about yourself? I have hardly seen you since you were last at Leigh. What made you come back so suddenly? was your mother there? or what happened? Let us turn to the fire; I have nothing very particular to do this evening, so you can talk as much as you like."

“Good heavens! may I? What a gracious permission! I ought to be hugely obliged to you for condescending to listen to me.”

Wynyard thought he was partly right there, but he only said: “I thought you intended to stay at Leigh till after Christmas?”

“Intended? No; you said I ought; but I never intended anything but to be governed by circumstances, as I always am. You were right just now about my mother being there; she was there, with all her friends.”

“Well, I suppose you consider the house your mother’s home as much as yours?”

“‘Ministers to make one die’—that was a capital speech of Florac’s in ‘The Newcomes.’ It made more impression on me than anything else in the book; puts all my life experiences into a nutshell. They were all there, every one of them, men and women.”

“If you were oftener at home, your mother would take more pains to suit her society to your taste, I should think. When you leave her alone of course she gets her old friends about her.”

“Come, now, Wynyard, did she ever think of my tastes in her life, except to try to crush them out as if they were serpents? Does she not consider it her first duty in life to bully me? and would not ploughshares

strewn in the way keep her from it? You know you never could stand her for more than ten days in the old times. After the first week or so of the holidays you used to sneak off to the Rivers's or somewhere, and leave me to bear the brunt of the lecturing alone."

"She was not my mother," said Wynyard, quickly. "However, what are we talking about? You don't wish me to condole with you on your mother's temper, I suppose. She is about the only relation you have in the world except myself; and she did the best she could for you when you were dependent on her."

"And now that she is dependent on me, you fancy, I suppose, that I find it easier to get on?"

"No," said Wynyard, with the first pleasant smile that had crossed his face since the talk began; "I know you both too well to fancy any such thing. I am certain that her conscience does not allow her to abate her vigilance over your shortcomings by a hair's-breadth, because she is now owing everything to you; and as for you, I won't say what quality it is in you that makes you a greater sneak than ever under the circumstances, but I am prepared to give up all hope of ever seeing you stand up to her as you ought, now that you have a house of your own, which you could turn her out of if you pleased."

"Then you ought to leave off bullying me when I turn

myself out of the house ; you know it's hammer-and-tongs when we are there together, and that I always hated it. When I think of the old Eton holidays in that awful little house in Chelsea, and the state I used to be in at the end of them, I wonder I am alive now. It's only natural I should want a year or two of peace and quiet to shake myself together again. Why should you object ?”

“I don't object ; I only say the sort of aimless life you are leading now is very bad for you, and it's for you to consider whether you ain't getting sick of it.”

“What's the good of considering ? I don't see anything else to be done—unless—yes, I had a scheme in my head, but for that you must help me ; and though it's for your own good as well as mine I declare I don't know how to put it to you.”

“I don't advise you to bring me into any of your plans ; it would not answer. You've got to learn to look after yourself, and if you can't, why should not you marry ?”

“That's the worst piece of advice you ever gave me. It would be a beastly selfish, and a monstrously silly thing to do. If I chose a wife to please myself and brought her home, there would be two people instead of one for my mother to bully ; and if I let my mother

choose for me one of her sort, there would be two people instead of one to bully me. It's out of the question. I want peace and quiet and something to amuse me, and you suggest getting married! I ain't so hard-hearted as all that. Fancy bringing a little frightened thing like the bride I saw yesterday to Leigh for my mother to sit upon!"

"There are plenty of girls as lovely and timid-looking as that one, who would be quite ready and thankful to attempt the adventure if you put it to them, I fancy," said Wynyard, rather bitterly. "By all accounts Lady Forrest has not been wanting in courage."

"Ah! but there it's the man himself that has the temper, or drinks, or something, is it not? and that's nothing—nothing to a nagging mother-in-law. A woman can always get the whip-hand of a man if she likes, and all the better for beginning by seeming afraid of him. So they say at least—I don't know. No mortal being ever even pretended to be afraid of me. I'm not made for ruling, I suppose. It is a dreadful mistake that you are not in my place, Wynyard, and that brings me to what I came here to talk about. I have been thinking of it ever since yesterday."

"I should have thought that was too old a story to be talked or thought about now, and, for myself, I don't see the use of it."

“ You will by-and-by, when I have got what I came to say right side up in my head, and can put it properly to you.”

There was a little pause, during which Wynyard took out his note-book and began to study it, and Lord Anstice folded and unfolded a stray sheet of foolscap into various shapes, with great appearance of interest. After finally producing a cocked-hat and sticking it on to a bust of Dante on the chimneypiece, he resumed, in a meditative tone :

“ No, I can't understand her passing for a beauty. She looked well yesterday, extremely well ; but I never could get over her nose. A woman with a nose like that has always too much to say for herself. I suppose you don't mind it, eh ? ”

Wynyard, who had now taken up a pencil, proceeded to re-write an obscure note, with an expression of face which he intended to make utterly indifferent and pre-occupied, but he could not prevent his features from quivering a little.

“ Why don't you answer a fellow ? ”

“ I don't know what you are talking about.”

“ Oh yes, you do. I was asking you whether you did not think Miss Rivers about as equal a match to my mother as one could expect to meet with in this genera-

tion. Those delicate aquiline noses and bright blue eyes, with a spice of devil in them, mean temper, don't they? and plenty to say for yourself. Altogether, a person who would not consent to be sat upon easily, eh?"

Wynyard returned his note-book and pencil to his pocket and sprang up from his chair.

"I'm going out," he began; "if you've exhausted all you have to say to me, and have nothing better to do than discuss Miss Rivers's nose, which is no business of yours or mine, let me remark, I shall leave you. I have just come across the address of an old fellow, whose acquaintance I made accidentally at a public meeting, and whom I promised to look up some day. I've a fancy to find him out to-night."

"That's to say, that any old fellow is better worth listening to than your own cousin, though he has come out on a wretched evening to talk to you about your own affairs."

"I have not heard anything about them yet; but you can come with me if you like."

"I'm coming, of course; I like your oddities, and when I've got you out in the streets, you won't be able to get away from me till I've had my say out."

"That depends," Wynyard observed when they were out in the air, and walking down the wet street arm-in-

arm. "I may as well tell you at once that I'm not in a humour to-night for chaff on the subject you introduced just now. Anything else you please; I don't want to be crusty, but that is tabooed now and for ever, unless you wish really to annoy me."

"There is nothing I mean less. It was not chaff either I was beginning upon. I had a handful of good wheat to show you, if you'd only have looked at it. Now, I suppose, I shall have to come round you with the halter some other way."

"If you really have anything to say—say it out. It can't possibly concern Miss Rivers."

"But it does. However, I've turned round now, and am beginning at the other end. What should you say to my cutting Leigh for a few years, and setting forth on my own hook, without letting anyone know precisely where I was going, and without knowing any better myself? A life of travel and adventure is positively the only sort of life I care a rap for; and why should not I have it? I should take plenty of money with me, and while it lasted, live about as I pleased in out-of-the-way places—Timbuctoo, perhaps—without any of my people being a bit the wiser; and when I came back, say in ten or fourteen years—who knows?—I might be ready to settle down and marry the woman my mother has in

her eye for me already, and make up to her for all the years wherein I have plagued her, by walking in her ways for the rest of my life. You may not credit it, but I have such a praiseworthy ending always in view, and nothing will bring me to it but a long spell of freedom first. What do you say?"

"Say! there's nothing to be said; but that it's as foolish and selfish a plan as you could possibly propose to yourself. You know perfectly well that your mother would be miserable, and that you've no right to throw responsibilities on her that she's even more unfit to deal with than you are yourself. You don't expect me to further such a project, I hope?"

"Wait a bit before you begin to swear at me. Just suppose for an instant or two that I'm dead."

"What's the use of that?"

"You'll see—say I'm dead, and that you immediately marry Miss Rivers: what would happen next? You would not, I take it, turn my mother out of Leigh, since she has taken to the place; or stop her from carrying out her favourite plans in the village, seeing that they are about all she cares for in life at present. She would be dependent on you instead of on me, and your wife would manage her. That's the point. The thing opened out to me as I sat looking at Miss Rivers's profile the

day before yesterday, and I've been thinking about it ever since."

"You don't mean to drown yourself on the uncertain prospect of getting Miss Rivers to manage your mother, I suppose?"

"Not at all. I go away for a few years, leaving the entire management of my affairs in your hands. You have sufficient clue to my whereabouts to send me money, but you decline to give such information to my mother or any of her allies as would set them on following and remonstrating with me. It's an understood thing among all parties that my eventual return and my future conformability depend on my taking a long spell of let-alone first; and meanwhile you marry Miss Rivers and do pretty much what you like at Leigh. You might try on any of your pet social schemes you pleased on the estate for anything I should care. Shut up all the alehouses, or give all the women votes if you can. I'd promise not to undo more than I could help when I got home again. How do you think it would work?"

"Like a good many of your plans, agreeably enough, perhaps, for yourself and very badly for everybody else concerned. What makes you suppose that I should be willing to give up my profession, and all my prospects in life, to do your work while you enjoyed yourself?"

“Well, I could tell you in a word why you should, if you will let me. Miss——”

“No, don’t go on,” interrupted Wynyard hastily. “It’s absurd. If I can’t put myself in a position to win the wife I want, by following my own line, I certainly shall not do it by becoming a paid servant of yours. You misunderstand the matter altogether.”

“But don’t be crusty. Servant is a notion of your own. Of course I meant a sort of partnership, of which you should settle the terms yourself, and that could go on all the same after I came back again to England. Leigh is large enough for a colony of us, and dull enough to want plenty of inhabitants to make it bearable.”

“Thank you—you mean well, I dare say ; but plans of that kind never answer, and I am the last person——”

“You ought to be the first person, if you put the smallest atom of faith in your own theories. I’ve heard you talk by the hour as if all private property was a mistake and everybody who has anything ought always to be giving it away to everybody else, and doing everybody’s work as well as his own ; and now, when a chance comes of carrying out your doctrine, and a fellow asks you to take the work he can’t do himself off his shoulders, and go shares with all that he has, you say, ‘It won’t answer,’ as coolly as if you had never preached it up as the right thing.”

“Don’t push me against the lamp-post in your vehemence. Look where you are going—you will have your umbrella hooked on to that woman’s bonnet in a minute.”

The woman was Katherine Moore; and as Wynyard pulled his companion farther on to the pavement, and slackened his pace to lower the obstructive umbrella, the sisters, talking eagerly, passed him closely on the lamp side, and Christabel’s remark about the pleasantness of a London fog, and her upward glance at the light, arrested the attention of the two young men at the same moment. They did not speak, but they exchanged glances, first of amusement, then of surprise, when the face, whose sudden beauty the lamplight had revealed, had been swallowed up again in the murky gloom of the street.

“Queer things one hears in the streets sometimes,” said Lord Anstice meditatively, after they had proceeded a step or two on their way. “I wonder what the girl meant by saying that London mud was sweet? I wish I could see her again and ask her. She looked as if she meant something more than met the ear, and I shan’t get her saying out of my head in a hurry; it was such a queer thing to hear in the street on a foggy day. Hallo! What’s that?”

“Not a queer thing to hear in these streets,” said

Wynyard; "some drunken row probably before the gin-shop at the corner. Here is our turning."

"But the girl who passed us just now went that way. I saw her pressing on as if she had business down there. Let's follow at all events to see what's up."

Wynyard, who had had a good deal of previous experience of the general inutility of interference in street rows, did not second his companion's desire to push on with the same eagerness that Katherine and Christabel had displayed. Consequently the two young men did not reach the scene of action till a few minutes after the appearance of the sisters there, and as a rough crowd had now poured out of the gin-shop near, they had some difficulty in forcing their way through to what seemed the core of interest—a clear space, close to the railway-arch, where four figures, disengaged from the throng, were standing out conspicuously; a woman leaning against the brickwork of the arch, wiping some blood from her face with the corner of a ragged shawl, and a man, who seemed lately to have turned from her towards two other women standing before him, one of whom had her hand on his arm. His face, on which such light as there was fell, wore an uncertain look, half-bewildered, half-savage, as of a person arrested in a moment of fierce passion, and held irresolute by some strange new experience, which had not as yet

translated itself into his consciousness as a cause for putting aside or inflaming his rage. The woman who was touching him, and on whose face his strained, bloodshot eyes were fixed, was still speaking, for a clear, refined voice was audible a few paces off through the hubbub of the crowd; but just as the two young men gained the outer circle of spectators someone in the throng laughed—a shrill, jeering woman's laugh. At the sound the arrested madness in the ruffian's face lighted up again like a jet of fire bursting forth, and as the evil flame leaped from his eyes, there came the dull sound of a heavy blow followed by a fall, and then a shrill wailing cry rang through the street. Two minutes of indescribable confusion and backward and forward surging of the crowd followed; but at the end Wynyard and his cousin had each accomplished the object they had respectively thrown themselves upon, when the sound of that cowardly blow fired their pulses. Wynyard, aided by a wiry little old man who had elbowed his way to the front at the same moment with himself, had pinioned the offender against the wall of the bridge, and was holding him firmly there till the proper authorities, who were said to be making their appearance round the corner of the street, should arrive to take him into custody. Lord Anstice had succeeded, he never quite knew how, in dragging up from under the feet of stupid starers and

gesticulators the woman he had seen felled to the ground, and in carrying her out of the throng of people intent on watching Wynyard's prowess, to a spot just beyond the shadow of the railway-arch, where a coffee-stall with its lamp and awning seemed to offer a sort of shelter. Two or three women followed him, and almost the first thing of which he was distinctly aware was the touch of a cold, trembling hand laid on his, and a voice, hoarse, but imperious, saying in his ear :

“Give her to me—here, into my arms. She is my sister.”

“Can you hold her? She has fainted!” he said, looking down into a small white agonised face in which he did not at the moment recognise the flashing-eyed smiling countenance he had noticed under the lamp a few minutes before.

“Of course I can ; she is my sister I tell you. She will open her eyes when she feels me. Oh, Kitty! Kitty!”

A woman pushed the coffee-seller's chair forward and drew Christabel into it ; and then Lord Anstice knelt down on the pavement, utterly regardless of wet and bystanders, and laid his burden across her knees. Neither he nor Christabel had presence of mind to think of any other course to take than this. They were both absorbed in one question, so dreadful to Christabel that it might not have suggested itself to her if she had not read it in his

eyes. What was the meaning of the death-like whiteness of the face, which fell prone on Christabel's shoulder as soon as Lord Anstice's supporting arm was withdrawn? Before he rose from his knees he had time to take in a good many particulars connected with the white face and drooping head, from which the bonnet, crushed into a shapeless mass, had fallen. Its high white brows, one of which was disfigured by a wound, the soft dusky hair brushed smoothly back from the face, the delicate ears, the sweeping black eyelashes and level eyebrows,—and he thought what a strange face it was to have grown death-like in a street row, and how still more incongruous with the surrounding scene—the flaring light of the coffee-seller's lamp and the flaunting and wretched figures gathered round—was the clear-cut cameo-like head that bent over it; the features as pallid and almost as motionless, but instinct with living agony instead of unconscious peace. He had time for these thoughts before any change came, and then there was a quivering of the white eyelids, a swelling of the nostrils, a moan from the recumbent head, and at the same moment the other face flushed up, and two earnest eyes, with a strange look of triumph in them, were lifted to his.

“There, you see, I said she would wake up as soon as she felt my arms round her; I knew she would come

back to *me*. Katherine, Katherine, my darling, I am holding you fast ! ”

Another long-drawn sigh, and then the dark-fringed lids were fairly raised, and the eyes turned to the face above them with something of an answering look of love ; and Lord Anstice, as he sprang to his feet ready for helpful action now that suspense was over, felt a curious pulse in his throat, and a quick bound of joyful relief in his heart, such as nothing that had occurred to himself for many a day had been able to give him. It was, to use his own phraseology, the “ oddest ” feeling he had known for a long time, and he quite applauded himself for being capable of such strong emotion. By this time Wynyard and his coadjutor had resigned their captive into the hands of the police, and they now joined the smaller group by the coffee-stall. The shabby old man, who, to Lord Anstice’s secret disgust, recognised Christabel and called her “ my dear,” immediately took the lead in deciding what was to be done.

“ These ladies are friends of mine,” he explained to Wynyard, “ and were coming to my house when the accident occurred. It is a few yards farther down the main road, in a side street : we had better get them there as quickly as we can, out of the way of the crowd that will soon be surging back to the gin-shop.”

Katherine, who was now sufficiently recovered to take part in the discussion, caught at this suggestion and managed to drag herself from Christabel's arms and put her feet to the ground; but the first effort to move brought a moan of pain, and though she assured Christabel that she believed no bones were broken, she was obliged to let herself be supported by the arms of the numerous helpers who came forward, and was at last fairly carried into the little shop. The jar of the last step across the threshold, and of being laid down on the hard sofa in the back parlour among the clocks, cost her another fainting-fit longer than the first, and while Christabel was occupied in applying restoratives, there was time for a few words of explanation to pass between the owner of the house and the two young men, whom alone of the crowd he had allowed to pass beyond the shop-door. As soon as he began to talk quietly, Wynyard recognised his acquaintance of the public meeting in the little old man, and he did not feel the less inclined to put him down as a social phenomenon for hearing him speak of Christabel as his teacher, and seeing her take from under her cloak a volume of Pascal, which was to have been the subject of their evening's study.

Surely there must be a spirit of travesty abroad to-night, and his long day's suppressed excitement had

carried him into some region of illusion, where perhaps there was nothing incongruous in wiry old shopkeepers being the pupils of pale young ladies, or in women with grand pure faces like that one on the sofa being knocked down by drunken ruffians in street-rows. It did not increase, but rather lessened Wynyard's bewilderment, when Christabel, in answer to his question, gave the name of the street and the number of the house where they lived, and he remembered all at once that it was Mrs. West's address, and recalled Lady Rivers's embarrassed explanation about the two young ladies whom her sister, Mrs. West, had taken into her house as companions for her daughter, that pretty shy little Emmie West, whom he had met in Alma's company once or twice during the course of the last year. This information seemed rather the *mot de l'énigme*, so far as accounting for his own share in the events of the evening went, for now he knew why it was that, failing the quiet reverie he had promised himself, a stroll in the direction of Saville Street had appeared the next most agreeable thing. It brought him not near the Rose indeed, but near the earth that sometimes touched the Rose.

All through this evening's walk there had been lying at the bottom of his mind a plan of turning towards Saville Street, when his visit to the watchmaker was

over, and (if his courage held good at the last moment) of paying a late call on Mrs. West, and finding an excuse for drawing Emmie into talk about the wedding that would include one speaking and one hearing of Alma's name at least. The project was at all events so fixed in his mind, that when Dr. Urquhart had been summoned, and had decided that Miss Moore must be conveyed home before anything could be done to relieve her, it seemed quite a matter of necessity that he should follow and see the end of the adventure. He did not even feel surprised at the energy with which his cousin scouted Dr. Urquhart's demur to the necessity of so many attendants accompanying his patient to her own door. He was glad to be upheld by a perfectly indifferent person in his opinion, that something would arise as soon as they all reached Saville Street to make the household there glad of the presence of two willing messengers, who might be sent anywhere that occasion required.

As it turned out, Wynyard's presence really was a boon to Emmie and Mrs. West, for they found him sufficiently quick of comprehension to be used as a decoy for the purpose of drawing Mr. West's attention from the unusual bustle and confusion in the lodgers' part of the house. He allowed himself to be hastily sent into the

dining-room, while Katherine's transfer from the carriage, through the hall, was being effected, and honestly taxed his conversational powers to the utmost, and kept Mr. West so well entertained that he quite forgot to harass the rest of the family by complaints and questions. After more than an hour's hard work, Wynyard had his reward. Mrs. West and Emmie came back to the room, and after a little talk over the accident, he found an opportunity for telling them that he had been present at Lady Forrest's wedding the day before. The remark started the sort of conversation he desired, talk that was always more or less hovering round Alma, and which at last brought out an expression of Mrs. West's preference for Alma over her sisters, and the relation of various anecdotes of her kindness to her Saville Street cousins. Wynyard (despising himself for his folly all the time) thought that the interest of these little stories, totally irrelevant to him and his concerns as they were, well repaid him for the hour and a half he had spent in waiting for the chance of some such treat. He knew that they did not concern him in the least, and ought not to alter his thoughts in any way, for he believed that he understood Alma's character better than anyone else did. Yet as he sat and listened, while the foolish little anecdotes fell in diffuse sentences from Mrs. West's lips,

he could not help receiving them into his mind as a brightly-coloured hazy background, prepared for him to begin painting hopeful pictures upon as soon as he should be alone at last. Emmie, seated on the edge of the sofa, and putting in a word now and again, entered into his thoughts only as a pretty incident in a scene that would always live in his memory with a certain pleasurable glow upon it. He had been so well amused himself that it did not occur to him to feel surprised at the sight of his cousin still lingering in the hall, when at last unmistakable signs of weariness in the master of the house had driven him to take leave.

“What did you find to do? and where have you put yourself these two hours?” he asked, when they were on their way home, and had settled preliminaries about meeting next day to offer their evidence of the assault they had witnessed.

Lord Anstice launched into a description of the Moores’ rooms, to which he had been invited by one of the children, under an idea that he was the attendant of the surgeon whom Dr. Urquhart had summoned to his assistance. He made a long and amusing story out of his encounters with different members of the crowded Saville Street household, not omitting to describe Emmie’s shy beauty and old Mrs. Urquhart’s wonderful evening-cap;

but he said very little about the real heroines of the evening, and nothing at all concerning a few words of conversation between himself and Christabel, which, though he might not perhaps have confessed it even to himself, had repaid him for a good deal of unusual self-denial.

The opportunity for talk had fallen out in this way. He was standing where he had been left by Casabianca, in the corner of the Moores' sitting-room, partly hidden by Christabel's easel, while the two medical men talked together by the fireplace, when Christabel came out from an inner room in which Katherine was, and walking straight up to him, touched him on the arm.

"My sister wishes to speak to you before you leave the house."

"Is she able?"

"She will not sleep till her wish is satisfied; follow me before we are forbidden," with a glance at Dr. Urquhart and a movement towards the bedroom. Lord Anstice followed her. Katherine was lying on a low bed, that fitted into a slope of the attic-roof, pale, but with full consciousness and energy in the grey eyes she turned on him.

"I want to ask one question before I sleep," she said, in a weak sweet voice. "You were there?—you saw it all, did you not?—you are——"

“Ralph Anstice,” he said, seeing that she paused and looked earnestly at him.

“I was wondering whether it was you whom I saw in the crowd. You came first to our help—I think you must have seen——”

“The blow that struck you down. I did, and you may be quite sure that the ruffian who dealt it shall get his deserts as far as I can accomplish it.”

“Hush! I was not thinking of him. I want to know what became of the woman whom he had struck before I came up. Did no one think about her? Did no one notice what became of her?”

“I can’t say that I did. She followed the crowd, I suppose.”

“But she seemed much hurt; she is a woman, you see, as well as I, and much more helpless.”

“At all events she shall be free from her tyrant for a pretty long time to come. I think I may safely promise you that.”

“But it may not be enough; it may not even be the best thing for her, if the man is her husband. I want you to understand that I interfered for her protection, and it is her good, not any foolish indignation on my account, that I want all of you who saw what happened to bear in mind, if you are called upon to give evidence

to-morrow. Do not make what happened to me the important point. I brought it on myself, and I shall feel guilty if things are made worse for that miserable woman on my account. I can trust David Macvie, and you—may I not?—to consider her welfare first, and not press the charge on my behalf, if prolonged punishment of the man would be bad for her.”

There was a moment's silence, while Lord Anstice hesitated in some embarrassment at the request; and Christabel, who had gone round to the other side of the bed, and was bending over Katherine, looked up at him.

“You had better do as my sister bids you,” she said. “She is always right, I can assure you, and the sort of person to be obeyed.”

As she spoke a sudden smile broke just for an instant over her face, bringing colour and light and sweetness upon it, and a look into the wonderful wide blue eyes that made them seem to his fancy like gateways, giving a glimpse into a new world, where such feelings as ennui, and weariness, and unprofitableness had no existence. In that moment he recognised the face to be the same as the one that had flashed upon him in the street, and struck him so much by its strange beauty.

When he had left Wynyard at his door, and was proceeding on his solitary way to his own quarters, he

occupied himself in wondering how one small pale face could wear such opposite looks, and which of those he knew, he should find upon it when he came to Saville Street again, as of course he must, to render an account of how he had kept his promise.

CHAPTER VI.

PROS AND CONS.

But busy, busy, still art thou,
To bind the loveless, joyless vow,
The heart from pleasure to delude
To join the gentle to the rude.

“So you saw Agatha when you were in Paris, and never wrote me word. How was that, Constance?”

“Speak lower, dear Alma, my maid is in the next room putting away all my bridal dresses, and the door is open.”

And young Lady Forrest, the bride of six weeks ago, looking very unbride-like in the deep mourning she had lately put on for her mother-in-law, whose sudden death had cut short the wedding journey, looked timidly towards a figure dimly seen through the open dressing-room door and then appealingly at Alma.

“Now, Constance, I hope you are not going to set up a fear of your servants in addition to all your other little terrors,” said Alma. “I did look, at all events, to seeing

some dignity and independence come with the consciousness of your wedding-ring. Do you ever mean to feel as if you were mistress of this house, I wonder?"

Constance answered by another frightened "Hush!" and Alma, after crossing the room and closing the door, knelt down by her sister's chair and put her arms round her.

"Now we are thoroughly alone at last," she said coaxingly. "I see it won't often be so. Let us *feel* alone this once, and speak one or two free words to each other once more in our lives. I have scolded mamma for wanting to make you talk, and here I am doing it myself; but I am so hungry for a little bit of your real self, Connie. We have not talked together in our old way since the day, three months ago now, when you came into my room and said: 'I am engaged to Sir John Forrest.' I was naughty, and you were frightened, and a thin ice wall grew up between us. It has passed away now, has it not? and you will at least let me look into your eyes, if you can't speak to me, and I shall read there how it is with you, now that you have six weeks' experience of what it is to be married."

"Of course, since Lady Forrest's death it is all very sad, so different from what we expected," Constance answered, still avoiding her sister's gaze.

“Yes; but that need not keep you from looking at me. The suddenness was very shocking, and it must have been sad for you both, hurrying home to find that all was over. But now that it is all over, let us speak the truth to each other about it. Lady Forrest was a very formal person, whom neither you nor I could get on with, and—I suppose it was very hard-hearted of me—but my first thought, when I heard she was dead, was that now there was one person less for you to be afraid of.”

“I had been making up my mind not to be afraid of her, but to try to get her to like me. I thought she might be a help to me; show me how to manage; give me hints when I felt at a loss, as I do sometimes.”

“I should have been frightfully jealous in that case. Yes, indeed, I don’t mean to give you up to anyone. You will have to confide in me still in the old schoolroom fashion. I will not allow that the mere fact of your being married has put such a gulf between us that we cannot be as useful to each other as we used to be. Now I challenge you to look me full in the face and say that you can do without me, and that you don’t, just now, long to talk to me without any false pretences.”

At last Lady Forrest did lift her drooping eyelids far enough to give Alma a good look into her lovely eyes.

“You don’t want me to say whether I am happy or

not, do you?" she asked, with a visible shrinking from the question. "You know it is very difficult, while everything is still so strange, to know exactly how it is with one; but (lowering her voice to a still softer whisper) I don't mind telling you, if this is what you want to know, that *he* is really very fond of me, in his way, he is indeed, Alma."

"What a singular *he*," cried Alma lightly, to conceal the pain the earnest look she had courted had given her. "But, my dear child, do you always call Sir John *he* in that awe-struck tone? Does he by chance belong to a tribe of savages I read of the other day, where a wife is not allowed, on pain of death, to speak her husband's name? It is considered a sort of sacrilege, I believe, among them, for a woman even to think of the man she belongs to by any other designation than master. Has he brought you to that faith already?"

"I wish you would not joke about it."

"Is it really so dreadful then? Nay, you must give me another look; you must not send me away from our private interview with such very fearful ideas of your present condition. Remember you are the first of us three sisters who has made the desperate plunge, and if you report badly of the new country, how am I ever to get across?"

“Oh Alma, indeed I have not said anything; I am quite content and convinced that I have done the right thing. Please don't go away and say or think that—in fact—that I don't feel as all girls do when they are first married, unless they have been merely silly and selfish, as mamma calls it, and have chosen to please their own fancy. I did my duty, and I feel sure that I shall be more and more satisfied with everything around me as time goes on.”

“We'll get to the *thing* part of it when mamma is here; while this precious hour to ourselves lasts, let us cast one more glance at the *he*, to satisfy my devouring anxiety. You are not going to be very much afraid of your husband, are you, you little coward? You say he is fond of you, and you used to know, with all your softness, how to weave a very pretty little tyranny out of your fears for anyone who cared enough about you to submit to it. The *caring* is the great point with you—is it not?—not so much *who cares*. Having got that, you will do very well, I should think, and grow happy and at ease with your husband. Shall you not?”

There was a pause, and then Constance said slowly:

“There are different ways of caring. A person may care for you to look and be exactly what *he* wishes, every minute of the day. That may be all his pleasure in you.

He may not be able to have an idea that you ever want to be or do anything for yourself. It is pleasant to be of so much consequence, but it is anxious work. One always has to be watching oneself, and trifles grow to be so terribly important."

"Yes, I see. In marriage it ought to be one thing or the other. If the two are not *really* one, they had better be two. The artificial way you are trying, where on one side it is all acting, must make a dreadful burden of life."

"But one will get used to it in time," said Constance, more cheerfully. "One may get to know so well what is expected of one in every little thing as never to make mistakes. That was why I began to reckon a great deal on seeing poor old Lady Forrest again. She had lived with him all his life, and must thoroughly have known all his little ways."

"Little ways!" Alma burst out. "Fads, I suppose, about the shape of your boots, and the set of your dress, and the phrases in which you speak of the weather. Oh Constance! to be anxious about such matters as that all one's life must indeed be a burden. Forgive me, dear! You know my way; I speak impetuously, and then it is over, and I am prudent forever afterwards. I promise never to try to make you discontented again."

A shade of pained displeasure had come into Lady Forrest's face; and Alma, feeling that her outburst had closed the gates of confidence, for that hour at least, hastened penitently to turn the conversation to more commonplace matters, where she should not be tempted to offend again.

"I can't help being glad," she said, "in spite of your regrets for old Lady Forrest, that you will begin your reign in this house as sole mistress. You will be able to carry out your own plans and tastes; and how mamma will enjoy helping you to remodel the antiquated furniture, and make the place homelike for yourself! Everybody allows that her judgment is good in such things, and I know you will enjoy giving her the pleasure of thinking she is helping you."

"Don't put such a notion into mamma's head, Alma, it would cause me dreadful trouble. Sir John hates changes, and I am afraid, more than anything else, hates mamma's taste. We must never let her know this; but he calls it, and some other things that you and I have been taught to believe in, vulgar. I hardly like to say it, but it's true, and he does not mind letting me know now what he thinks of us all. You can't imagine the relief it is to me to put away my *trousseau*, and remember that when our mourning is over I can get fresh clothes from

people he approves, whose taste he won't question on every point."

"All your pretty things that we chose together, and that poor mamma fussed over to such an extent, are you actually burying them all?"

The tears rushed to Lady Forrest's eyes, and she turned her head away to hide them as she answered:

"You don't know how tiresome it was to be told half-a-dozen times every day that there was something a little wrong in what I had on. I see you think I ought to have stood up for mamma's taste and yours, but it is very difficult to go on for ever answering the same sort of objections to every trifle about one—over and over again."

"I should think so, indeed. But I can't help feeling sorry that all the little links between Constance Rivers and Constance Forrest are put away so quickly. You might as well have been Marie Antoinette, changing all her clothes, down to her stockings, before she was allowed to cross the frontier into her husband's kingdom. She got the upper hand over her lout of a king, let us remember, in the long run, and I don't despair of seeing even you pluck up courage to reign over the kingdom you have come into possession of, some day. It wants a great deal of reforming, I can see at a glance, stately as the general effect is. I shall begin to respect you when you

have succeeded in making those dismal state-rooms habitable. Do you remember how chilly we felt in them on the memorable occasion of old Lady Forrest's one ball, and how I longed to rummage among the *pot-pourri* vases, and the china dragons, and monster jars? Shall you ever dare to move them to see what secret cupboard-doors there may be behind them, Lady Bluebeard?"

Constance could not help smiling, though she coloured a little as she answered:

"I will confess something that will amuse you; but you must not talk about it to me again before anyone. I went into the great drawing-room yesterday, when Sir John was out, and to prevent myself from thinking too much of that ball and all it led up to—which you know I only half expected at the time—I began to take some of the old chintz covers off the worked chairs, and to look into the cabinets, and drag out all sorts of wonderful old treasures. I would not have the servants in to help, for fear they should take me for an inquisitive school-girl; and as I went on I got excited over my work, though with a guilty feeling all the time, as if old Lady Forrest might suddenly open the door of a cabinet behind me, and ask me what I was doing with her ancient worked chairs and her beloved priceless china. I forgot all about Sir John till I heard the folding-doors of the anteroom

open (about half-a-mile from where I happened to be kneeling, with my spoils all about me), and saw in the distance the figure of a gentleman coming through. It was quite too dark for me to make out who it was at first, and I can tell you that my heart did beat quickly, and I felt a very coward, till the intruder got near enough for me to see that it was not my husband, only Wynyard Anstice, who had come to inquire after us, and been shown in by mistake. He looked so like old times—old holiday times with the boys—that I could not help letting him see how relieved I was that it was only he, and when lights were brought, I showed him what I had been doing, and we had a good laugh over my fright. Oh Alma! such a laugh as I had not had for two whole months. Then we set to work to put things straight again, and we worked as hard together as if we had been tidying the old school-room after a sham fight on a holiday afternoon; and just as Wynyard was lifting the last china monster back to its old place on a shelf over my head the door opened again—and that time it was to let in Sir John!”

“And you told him what you had been doing?”

“Alma! He would never have thought me sane again as long as he lived. If you had been with us for the last six weeks you would know better than to expect such candour from me. I might almost as well have got my-

self unmarried, for he would never have taken in the idea that Lady Forrest could so conduct herself. Wynyard Anstice understood the state of the case much better than you do. He turned away from his vase, as if he had strolled up to it casually to look at it nearer, and kept Sir John in conversation cleverly till I had recovered my countenance and was ready to take my share in the talk."

"Oh Connie, I know just the sort of imploring look you darted at him from under your eyelashes to make him do that. How you can call yourself a shy person and yet bear to make such revelations in sudden moments, I never could understand."

"It did not tell Wynyard Anstice anything new. It was a bit out of old times for him. As he sat talking to Sir John I knew, for I read it in his face, that he was thinking to himself how characteristic all this was of the cowardly little Constance, whom he and Alma always used to scramble out of her scrapes. My imploring look did not reveal anything fresh about me to him."

"Except that you are afraid of your husband; and oh Connie! I am afraid you would have done just the same if young Lawrence, or anyone of your old lovers, had come in."

"I did not show that I am afraid of my husband, only that I respect him, as I have always respected the proper

authorities. I have not been troubling myself at all about that part of yesterday's little adventure. I really did not see that I had done anything foolish so far."

"What else have you to confess? Did you give Sir John to understand by your manner that we are still on our old terms of intimacy with Mr. Anstice, or did you stiffen back into the coldness mamma has prescribed of late, after Sir John came in?"

"That is the confession I have to make, dearest Alma, and if I decided the wrong way for your real interests and wishes, you must forgive me. I sat and thought about it while I recovered breath in my shady corner, and Sir John and Wynyard discussed the day's *Times*. I had come to the conclusion that I would not commit myself to great intimacy; I would gently slide down from the familiarity of the last half-hour to something that, while it was sufficiently friendly to be consistent, would not provoke questions from Sir John. I had, I know, called up just the right medium expression to my face, but when Wynyard got up to take leave, and held out his hand to me—I can't account for it, Alma, it was something in his eyes, I suppose, that I could not resist, just after he had been helping me—but I actually told him that you were coming here to spend the day to-morrow, and invited him to dine with us alone, at eight o'clock."

“What did Sir John think of such a proceeding—just now, when you are seeing no one?”

“He was not well pleased at first; but he has less objection to Wynyard Anstice than to others of our friends, whom mamma thinks more of, because, as he says, he knows who he is. Then, luckily for me, he had been a little put out in the morning, when he heard I had asked you to spend the day, because we should be three for dinner, and I bethought me of remarking that my impromptu invitation was given to secure an even number. I added that you would have no objection to the *vis-à-vis* I had secured for you.”

“You should not have said that.”

“Well, then, I am rightly punished, for as things have turned out I have brought myself into a great—you need not smile, Alma—a serious perplexity. You bring me word that papa intends to do me the honour of dining here to-day, and I could not, no, coward as I am, I could not vex him by letting him see so soon that unexpected guests for dinner are not as welcome to Sir John as he, with his easy-going ways, had been used to make them at home. I cannot put off papa on his first offered visit; but all the same, I do tremble at the thought of what Sir John’s feelings will be when he sees the party he is expected to sit down with at eight o’clock. Papa, who

will come after a long day in court, with his worn, pre-occupied, Lord-Justice look, and who must either sit opposite you, or have no one to match him."

"It is only a family party."

"Our notion of a family party is undreamed of here. Can you help me to a way out of my dilemma? Can you suggest a niceish-looking lady, who would come at an hour's notice (it is five o'clock, and growing dark already), and sit quietly opposite papa, without in any way annoying Sir John?"

"Emmie West," suggested Alma promptly. "It would so please papa; he has a sore place in his conscience about the Wests, and is continually wanting us to do more for them, though he does not know exactly what. Mamma would not have Emmie asked to the wedding, and to my mind there is a sort of poetical justice in your being driven to invite her as your first guest. Come, be bold; I have often said that my first act of independence, when I had a house of my own, should be to ask all the Wests at once to dinner."

Constance made a gesture of despair.

"What am I to do, if you take it into your head that this house is *my own*, and that I can ask whom I please? Sir John has never heard of the Wests, and I never intended that he should. He has a horror of rela-

tions, and wonders sometimes whether all the boys, and you, will marry; dreading, I can see, to be dragged into depths of vulgarity by one or other of our clan."

"As there is no saying what we may do, you had better begin to inure him early. Little Emmie West can't be looked upon as an eyesore, seated opposite to papa at dinner, I should think."

"I don't know; I have dreadful recollections of Emmie West at our Christmas parties, in scrumpy washed muslin dresses, eked out at the bottom with cheap edging, and with shoes, and gloves, and ribbons that looked as if they had come out of Noah's Ark. If that was the result when there had been weeks of preparation, I tremble to think what would be the effect of a hasty toilette."

"Better, perhaps; or stay, let us bring her here, and you shall make her a present of one of those pretty evening dresses you talk of burying. It would be a cheap bit of good nature, Connie, since you never mean to wear any of them again yourself. I will back Emmie West not to look the least bit like a poor relation, when we have dressed her up. She is just your height, and I have always had my doubts as to whether she would not turn out to be prettier than anyone of us, if she were properly dressed."

"I should like it," said Constance, "and it is perhaps

the best thing to do, for I don't think Sir John objects to anything in the world so much as sitting down an uneven number at dinner. Poor Aunt West will be immensely gratified at my calling on her so soon and inviting Emmie."

"It is a capital opportunity for feeling your new importance," said Alma, smiling; "and if one is to marry grandly, one may as well get all the compensating pleasures out of the situation."

"Have you seen much of Wynyard Anstice since I left home?" Constance asked, when the sisters were driving to Saville Street.

"He called once," said Alma, the more inclined to be communicative, because there was not light enough for her sister to read her face. "He called the day after your wedding, and we had a long talk together about Agatha."

"Oh!" said Constance thoughtfully, "then I know what happened. One can't help opening out when one talks of Agatha. I suppose I did right to go and see her in her convent when I was close to her, but it cost me a terrible fit of crying. She wanted to hear all about Sir John and my engagement, questioning me in her old earnest way; and, do you know, Alma? I found that I could not answer. I could not speak about my marriage to

her as I had spoken of it to other people. It looked suddenly such a solemn thing—done forever—and I could not feel just then that I had had reason enough. In that little bare room, with Agatha in her serge dress, sitting by me, all mere outside things looked so small and mean.”

Alma did not say what she thought: “You know then that you have only got outside things.” She put her hand over her sister’s and sat silently waiting—not without a little quick beating of the heart—for Constance to bring out the connecting thought between her first and her last remark, which she certainly had not expressed so far.

It came, at length, in a thoughtful tone. “I felt sure something had happened between you and Wynyard Anstice. When he asked after you there was a tone in his voice that told me——”

“No! no! there is nothing to tell—you must not be fanciful. I assure you that nothing passed; but, as I said before, talk about Agatha.”

“Ah! but you must have said something without knowing it, perhaps, that has made him think better of you than he did a little while ago. He felt bitterly about the change in our manner to him at one time. I used sometimes to think he more than half despised us

all; and though he hovered about you, he felt his liking for you a sort of bondage, and hated it in his heart. Now there is a change, and I am afraid, dear, that unless you have courage to go against mamma, you will have to do once again all that it cost you so much to do a year ago. You are a great deal stronger than I am, Alma, perhaps it would not be so difficult for *you* to get your own way, if this is what you wish, and make what people call a love-match. I am not advising it, of course; only, if one could marry a man one loved so truly that one was not the least bit afraid of him, I think sometimes it might be worth a struggle, or even giving up a little worldly prosperity for such rest as that would be.”

They had left the quarter of the town with which they were familiar by this time, and reached a drearier, more monotonous region, and Alma sat for a time without speaking, her face towards the window, apparently looking out—really looking within, though the objects which passed before her eyes gave a certain colouring and tone to her reflections. It was just one of her usual seesaws of thought and feeling, cold and hot fits, doubt and confidence swaying her alternately, with self-contempt, for not being more heartily in earnest, underlying all. It was not poverty exactly that she feared. She had not

the lazy luxury-loving nature of her mother and Constance. She could have joined partnership with one of like ambition with her own; but then it must be with the definite aim of conquering fortune in the end, and worldly advancement must be as dear to him as to herself. She could not look forward to contentment except in the world's high places, or imagine herself sinking permanently to what she called a sordid life. Her father's career had always been her ideal of what was admirable in the life of a professional man; and in her glorying over his triumphs, a standard of worldly success, as the only test of worth, had been formed in her mind, and coloured all her thoughts. She could despise her mother's restless efforts for the family aggrandisement, but her own ambition was essentially of the same nature, and had the same blight of worldliness upon it. When she turned round to Constance again, her first words showed the direction her thoughts had taken.

“Papa was talking about him to me the other day,” she said; “I know what he meant. It was not that mamma had set him on to speak, as she has done before. His views of things are never, you know, really the same as mamma's, though in this matter they agree in their wishes about me. He talked to me just as if I were one of the boys, like a reasonable creature with a

career before me; and then, without alluding to the past, he let the conversation turn on Mr. Anstice's prospects, and said how sorry he was that he was not more practical, and did not seem disposed to put himself under his advice. He said that Wynyard had just now refused something—I don't know what, but something that papa says he should have taken at his age with a view to its leading to further advancement—because accepting it would have committed him to the support of some people, or some principles that he does not approve of. Papa did not say he was altogether wrong, but he called it an ultra-conscientious scruple, such as he should have stepped over at Wynyard's age. It was the old story over again on a smaller scale, and I can see the impression it has made on papa."

"How strange! just when he is, I am sure, fonder of you than ever."

"In a way," said Alma bitterly; "but, oh Connie! not in the way in which I should like to be loved. I wonder whether there is really no alternative, and that we unlucky women have to take our choice between being a little loved by men who can see plenty of higher objects and interests in the world than our poor little happiness, and who put us last; or a good deal loved by fools, who put us first?"

“Not always,” said Constance, sighing in her turn. “I don’t think there is any good in expecting to be put first for long by anyone. A man’s crotchets need not be like Wynyard Anstice’s, about principles and imaginary things, to stand in the way of loving ; the other sort serve just as well for that. But here we are in Saville Street. I wonder what Sir John’s servants will think about my coming here, and if they will notice how much dingier Uncle West’s house looks than even the other shabby houses on this side of the street.”

CHAPTER VII.

A TURNING-POINT.

Pity would be no more
If we did not make somebody poor ;
And mercy no more would be
If all were as happy as we.

THE unusual sound of carriage-wheels, and the echo-awakening footman's knock had a magical effect, in bringing as much animation to Mrs. West's dull house as the apparition of numerous heads at the upper windows could give it ; and in the long interval which elapsed before the summons brought any response, Alma and Constance had time to remark on these sudden appearances.

“That is old Mrs. Urquhart's cap at the drawing-room window ; and there is another strange face observing us from the upper storey. How annoying it is that we can't call here without being stared at by all the lodgers. It is really very hard on us to have relations, who have reduced themselves to the position of lodging-

house keepers. I don't wonder really now at mamma's keeping out of their way."

"It is how you will behave to me, Connie, if I marry Wynyard Anstice in an ill-advised moment, and find myself, at the end of a few years, managing a temperance coffee-house, or teaching in a board-school. I should deserve banishment more than Aunt West, for I should have run the risk with my eyes open, and she, poor thing, married in the most praiseworthy manner, the richest man that asked her."

"Ah well," said Constance, "it shows the truth of what mamma said, when she spoke to me about Sir John's offer. One is not really safe till one gets into the class above vicissitudes—the solid old gentry class—whose lands and titles can't fly away. It's a great thing to be safe. But here at last is Aunt West's old Mary Ann opening the door. I trust she won't receive us very gushingly, or pour out a whole budget of family news on the doorstep in the footman's hearing."

Luckily Mary Ann was too conscious of the state of the floorcloth and mats, reduced to mere rags by Harry's and Casabianca's recent zeal in house-cleaning, to risk a long exposure of them to critical eyes; and Constance and Alma were taken into the dining-room without as much delay as would have given Emmie and

Mrs. West time to finish hiding the work they were busied upon when the carriage drove up to the door. It was an old great-coat of Mr. West's which they were picking to pieces, to make from it winter jackets for the boys. Constance, as she sat in Mr. West's own arm-chair, wrapped in her fur cloak, with her hands in her muff to keep them warm, noticed the dark cloth-stains, and marks of rough work on her aunt's thin hands, and felt disgusted at the sight, even while she was delivering a message entrusted to her by Agatha, to the effect that the young novice considered herself happy, to be now sharing the holy discipline of poverty, of whose lessons her aunt had formerly spoken to her. Alma overheard the message, through her talk with Emmie, but she was as little disposed to be edified by it, just then, as Constance herself. She saw nothing attractive in poverty in the Wests' house, even if she could believe in its wearing a certain picturesqueness in Agatha's cell. It only irritated her to observe how Emmie's pretty soft skin had been reddened and roughened by the chill atmosphere of the room she had been shivering in all the afternoon, and that her hands were so badly stained by the coarse work she had been doing, that hardly any amount of washing and salts of lemon would serve to make them fit to be seen when she took off her gloves at dinner.

When Constance gave her invitation, and an anxious discussion as to whether Emmie could be spared for the evening began, Alma fell into silence, and busied herself by noticing all the little discomforts, and tokens of petty thrift, which the melancholy dusty room disclosed to her eyes—educated to the appreciation of very different surroundings. The sight filled her with indignation against men, who had not energy or resolution enough to save those who depended on them from sinking into such cramped and miserable conditions of life. She had no patience with Mr. West, and she tried to say to herself that misplaced scrupulousness would be just as reprehensible as idleness or incapacity, if it brought the same results into family life ; more perhaps, because scruples could be overcome by a strong will, when incapacity could not. If anyone offered poverty to her, it would be because he thought her degradation (for so Alma chose to put it that day) of less consequence than his own scruples. She must not forget that there was always that standard to measure his love by, whatever his tongue or his eyes said. Constance might have chosen unfortunately, but, after all, it was not *only* rich men who kept their wives in bondage to their humours. Poor and unlucky husbands could be quite as tyrannical, as might be gathered from Aunt West's anxious glances at the

timepiece, and from the length of the discussion which still went on.

“But I am wondering what your uncle will say to Emmie’s being the first member of the family invited: he has his particularities and a pride of his own,” Mrs. West was explaining, in her soft apologetic voice to Constance, feeling as much as did her hearer, all the inconsistency of a ruined man presuming to keep such luxuries.

“Will papa be annoyed at your going, do you think, Emmie?” she continued, turning to her daughter; “and how are the children to be kept quiet while he is at dinner? It is Harry’s late night at the office, and the boys always take a noisy fit when they are left with Mildie.”

Emmie suggested that Katherine Moore had invited the boys to come up to “Air Throne,” on this the first evening of her being allowed to sit up till supper-time. “It would be a great treat for the boys.”

The eagerness betrayed in her daughter’s voice decided Mrs. West more than her argument. Did not Emmie richly deserve that she should risk a little more grumbling than usual from Mr. West, to give her a pleasure?

“Run away then, dear, and get ready at once. Don’t keep your cousins waiting. I will send the message to Miss Moore.”

“Ah!” said Emmie, with a bright look round the

room, as she rose to leave it, which made Alma understand what ecstasy there was for her in the thought of changing the scene for a few hours, "mamma does not trust me. She thinks there is no hope of my coming back under an hour, if I run up to tell the Moores of my good luck; but," leaning over her mother's chair as she passed it, and putting cheek to cheek that she might whisper in her ear, "I see what o'clock it is, and I won't make the evening worse for you, darling, by keeping the carriage till papa sees it, not for worlds. I will save for to-morrow all the praise I know I shall get from Katherine Moore, for daring to go out visiting in my linsey dress."

Mrs. West took comfort in the thought that it was a new linsey dress of a becoming colour, bought, instead of a floorcloth, with a part of the money left from the sale of the necklace; and when, after five minutes' absence, Emmie came back in her winter jacket and hat, and with a gay Roman scarf, Mrs. Urquhart's last present, round her neck, the mother's fond eyes could not see anything in her daughter's looks or attire that should have made the most prosperous cousins in the world other than proud of her company. Constance noticed the approving glance, and was so much taken up in wondering whether any amount of perfect dressing would ever win her such a look from her husband, that for once the weak part of

Emmie's attire, the gloves that were several shades too dark to match her dress, and a good deal worn at the fingers as well, escaped her critical eyes. Emmie was perfectly aware of the deficiency herself, and but for thoughts of Katherine Moore, would have tried to hide her hands under the flaps of her jacket when she found herself seated in the carriage opposite two fur-lined cloaks, and two perfect Paris bonnets, and two pairs of fresh innumerable-button gloves. But then, as Katherine Moore frequently observed, gloves are such a constantly-recurring problem to people who must wear them, and can rarely afford to buy them, that the only chance of peace of mind is to resign one's hands to reprobation without a struggle. When Emmie forgot the ends of her fingers, the rapid drive through the brightly-lighted streets was a piece of ecstasy for her. Alma and Constance exchanged glances of amusement when by-and-by her happiness bubbled over in snatches of more confidential talk than they were usually regaled with by members of the West family—praises of Harry, jokes about Mrs. Urquhart's encounters with Casabianca, anecdotes of Katherine Moore.

“Ah,” remarked Alma, “a friend of mine heard her speak at some queer public meeting, and told me about it. I thought it an odd proceeding.”

“But *he* did not,” said Emmie quickly. “He

admired her speech. He did not think there was any harm."

"He! who, my dear?" asked Alma, a little coldly.
"How do you know anything about it?"

"He told me himself, Mr. Anstice," answered Emmie, drawing a little back into the shade of her corner of the carriage to hide her face, that had grown stupidly red in a moment. "Did not you know he had been to our house several times lately to inquire after Katherine Moore? He was with us yesterday evening and stayed an hour. Did not you know?"

"How should I know? What business is it of mine?" said Alma indifferently. But she leaned back in silence during the rest of the drive, while Constance catechised Emmie about Katherine Moore's street adventure, and the previous life of the sisters, and ended by giving her an emphatic warning against turning out an emancipated woman on their hands.

Emmie's talk was like a peep into a new world to Alma—a topsy-turvy world, repugnant to all her tastes and prejudices—and though she was not jealous (she had too much confidence in her own power for that), it annoyed and chilled her to discover that her lover had chosen to thrust himself into such an alien region, and could apparently find himself so much at home there. Yet at the

end of the drive Emmie had become a more important personage in Alma's eyes than she had ever been before. She was now in the way of hearing and seeing what Alma would give a great deal to hear and see, and might drop a word of news sometimes when her heart hungered for it, and she dared not ask it from any one who understood her better. Emmie was no longer an ignorant child, whose company, by a great stretch of good nature, could be tolerated for a little while now and then; they two might possibly have something in common henceforth worth talking about.

The change in Alma's manner which this instinct, it was hardly a thought, brought about was not lost on Emmie's quick sensitiveness, and it lessened her embarrassment when the question of the evening dress was brought forward and Constance offered her present.

Her hopes of being able to carry off the plainness of her linsey dress by a judicious disposition of Mrs. Urquhart's scarf round her shoulders were dashed by a sight of the evening costumes laid out in Lady Forrest's dressing-room, to which her cousins took her as soon as they got into the house; and, in spite of independence and Katherine Moore, she could not help being thankful to hear that they intended to make her look like other people. Harry's spirit might take fire at the notion of

her consenting to be dressed up in cast-off finery ; he might call her a toady for being willing to accept a present from relations who looked down on the family—*that* would have to be argued out in the back-room assembly to-morrow night ; but meanwhile Emmie could not but warm up to interest and gratitude when she was told to choose for herself, from a pile of treasures, all the items of a thoroughly satisfactory evening attire—shoes, gloves, ribbons, all the little niceties of dress which she had never allowed herself to hope for in perfection hitherto. Her pleasure was complete when Alma herself condescended to take an interest in the momentous choice, holding ribbons against her hair to find out the most becoming shades, and bringing out the daintiest of Constance's kid boots to suit the slim feet, at which even the disdainful maid could not help exclaiming.

At length Emmie retired to old Lady Forrest's deserted bedroom to array herself in her borrowed plumes. A discovery she had made at the last moment occupied her thoughts a good deal while she was dressing. Mr. Anstice was expected at dinner, and somehow or other the notion of appearing before him in her unwonted magnificence did not quite please Emmie. She had been wearing her oldest linsey dress, the ugly grey one, yesterday evening when he called, and only this afternoon

she had pleased herself by thinking that on the occasion of the next visit, the new purple would be less offensive to eyes accustomed to look at better-dressed people. Such an improvement as that would call for no remark, it might be felt almost without being seen; but how should she keep herself from crimsoning with consciousness if he should look even slightly surprised at recognising the shabby little daw of yesterday in such manifest jay's feathers? Emmie felt a little wonder at herself that she should think so much more of Mr. Anstice's possible surprise (he might never so much as look at her) than of her uncle's, who was very likely indeed to come out with some *mal à propos* comment on her looks, but then——

The sound of a gong echoing through the house made Emmie start just as she was tying the ribbon Alma had chosen, into her hair, and prevented her finding the good reason for this strangeness which she knew there was, and before her fingers had finished their task, Alma came in to look her over before taking her down to the drawing-room to be introduced to Sir John Forrest. There was no fault to be found. The soft, pale-green dress Emmie had chosen fitted her well, and with its puffings of white silk and bunches of snowdrops set off her pink and white complexion perfectly. A clever maid would have done more with the thick crop of dark brown hair, which

Emmie had wound in soft coils round and round her head; but Alma pronounced that after all a more elaborate arrangement would have spoiled the shape of the head, which, left to nature, looked just the right size for the slender neck to uphold, and crowned her person as a delicately-coloured Japanese lily crowns its stalk. Emmie had a style that would not bear much decoration, Alma decided, considering her critically. It really was quite as well that her small ears had never been pierced; earrings would only interfere with the right effect. Constance, who had now joined them, pronounced this a fortunate arrangement of Providence, since Emmie was never likely to possess handsome jewels, and tawdry earrings were horrors she must never indulge in if she hoped for her cousins' good opinion. With this judicious extinguisher to any latent love of finery which the sight of the many jewel-cases on Lady Forrest's dressing-table might have awakened, Emmie was invited to follow her cousins downstairs.

"Have I ever seen Sir John Forrest?" she whispered nervously to Alma, on her way to the drawing-room. "Was he at your Christmas party last year? Will he recognise me, and wonder how I come to be wearing one of Connie's dresses?"

"No fear of his claiming acquaintance either with you

or the dress," said Alma, laughing. "We did not know him ourselves at Christmas. Connie and he were caught in a thunderstorm together last August, on the Righi, and fell in love, let us say, under an umbrella. We only knew the Forrests by reputation as belonging to the most exclusive set in London till love caught Constance up among them. Now you have the whole story. Romantic, is it not, and a conquest to be proud of?"

Emmie was not sure whether the tone in which the last words were spoken was mocking or really triumphant, but as she entered the room behind her cousins she conjured up an imposing, aristocratic-looking hero for Constance's mountain adventure, and was proportionally taken aback when a stout, middle-aged man, with a grave, fat face, and grey whiskers of a very formal cut, came forward to meet the entering group of ladies, and Constance presented her to him as "Miss West, who has been spending the afternoon with Alma and me." "Miss West," not my cousin Emmie. There was not a word to bespeak better acquaintance, only, as Emmie was quick to feel, an anxious deprecatory glance, which seemed to beseech forgiveness for her being there at all, and beg for as indulgent a scrutiny as was possible from the cold, severe eyes which seemed to Emmie to be the only feature in the empty face that had anything like life in it.

Constance's husband ! For an instant Emmie could not believe she had heard aright, and looked eagerly towards two other figures near the fire, hoping that further investigation would show the mistake. No ; they turned round, her uncle and Mr. Anstice, and Emmie felt glad that her host's greeting had only detained her an instant, for she would have been sorry to miss seeing the equally silent hand-shake that passed between Mr. Anstice and Alma when they met close to the hearth-rug. It was as good to look at as one of Christabel Moore's pictures, if only there had been a little bit of letter-press underneath to explain the meaning of the looks exchanged, that did not tell a straightforward story to Emmie. The pleading in his eyes that rested a second or two on her face, as if taking in a long draught of sunlight, and the slight quiver of her lip, and the visible effort with which she emptied her eyes of meaning, when after a second of hesitation she lifted her drooping lids, and saw how she was being looked at—what did it mean ? Emmie had long had her own little theories, which she believed and rejected by turns, of Alma's and Mr. Anstice's relations to each other ; but she could not quite make these looks, or the long silence that followed, fit in with any one of them.

The party at dinner was not a talkative one. Emmie, sitting opposite her uncle, whose alternate fits of absence

of mind and inconvenient talkativeness made him a formidable *vis-à-vis* for her, had time to discover that other causes than scantiness of provisions might give uneasiness to host and hostess. . It might be natural enough that Constance should feel a little nervous while entertaining her father for the first time in her own house, but it did seem strange to Emmie, who thought herself versed in graver troubles than any her cousins knew, to see Constance turn pale when Sir John addressed a whispered question to a gentlemanly man behind his chair, and frowned over the answer; as pale as her mother turned, when Mary Ann brought breathless news of a catastrophe in the kitchen, which meant a bread-and-tea dinner for everybody in their house that day. Could anything go very seriously wrong in a household where dinner seemed to be an august ceremony, almost like a religious service? If so, was it good-nature or inadvertence which just at this crisis made her uncle wake up from absorbed enjoyment of an *entrée*, and address a question to Mr. Anstice, which presently drew the two lawyers into an eager discussion of a legal topic that no one seemed disposed to share with them? The effort might be well-meant, but it did not answer the purpose of bringing good-humour and ease to the top and bottom of the table.

Sir John's face grew more and more wooden, and the tone in which he said "Exactly" more and more unmeaning, at every attempt to draw an opinion from him; while Constance leant back in her chair, and played with the contents of her plate, instead of eating her dinner, very certain that her first trial at entertaining her own people was not proving a success. She had meant to take a private opportunity of begging her father not to slide into professional talk with Mr. Anstice, but the little excitement of fetching Emmie had put it out of her head; and now it seemed to her that she read in her husband's sullen face the fate of all her future efforts to bring her family about her. All the little devices for securing the relief of congenial, familiar companionship, with which she had comforted herself during the dreary *tête-à-tête* of the last six weeks, her father was blowing them *all* away with his voluble legal talk, thinking all the while, too, that he was doing her good service, and keeping the conversation up to the point of brilliancy he prided himself on always maintaining at his own table. Lady Forrest saw before her long, long vistas of dinners—whole years of them—during which she should sit looking at that sullen face opposite, depending on its more or less of gloom for her comfort or discomfort through the evening, and her heart sank at the prospect.

Even the old family plate, in such much better taste than the heavy modern *épergnes* and salvers that were the joy of her mother's heart, failed to cheer her greatly; for what satisfaction could one get from the most perfect and unique possessions, if one were not allowed to display them before those whose pride in one's dignity seemed now the only thing that made it much worth having? Ah, there was her father launched on one of the stock anecdotes he always had recourse to at home when he felt suddenly self-convicted of having neglected the weaker intellects among his audience. Constance looked across at her husband: would he say "Exactly" at the end of the story about the Irish advocate who apostrophised a prisoner in the dock as "a serpent in a tail-coat, shedding crocodile tears, with a hat upon his head;" or would he condescend to smile at this grand *tour de force* of her father's comicality? It seemed a turning-point; and when the inevitable word in the usual dull tone came out, she felt as if it were a sentence to gloom for all the remaining evenings of her life, and she made a great effort to swallow a piece of ice-pudding to keep down a sob that threatened to rise in her throat.

Emmie wished she could help thinking everything handed to her so nice, that she longed to transport each dish as it passed to the dinner-table at home, or to Air

Throne, where the boys and Mildie were probably just then feasting on stale buns with Katherine Moore. Otherwise she felt she could conscientiously tell Katherine next day that she agreed with her about the inanity of polite society, and truly preferred the noisiest and scrambling tea at home to the grandeur in which she was sitting silent and unnoticed. Before and after the "crocodile-in-a-hat" anecdote, which diverted *her*, if no one else, she had time to hatch a good many private anxieties in her brain; as to whether she must have a cab to take her home, which would have to be paid from the slender emergency purse she and her mother watched over so anxiously—whether Constance would remember to tell her maid to put up the purple linsey dress, and whether she should have courage to ask any servant in the house to bring it downstairs and put it in the cab? The longer she thought, and the oftener she glanced up at the grave faces, and decorous figures that flitted noiselessly about the room on the service of the table, the more did this difficulty loom mountainous before her.

There was some relief when the move to the drawing-room came. Emmie felt the glamour of pleasure in pretty things and luxury steal over her, as she sat by the fire sipping coffee from Sèvres china cups, that were curiosities worthy of a museum, and listened to Alma

playing dreamy music on the grand piano, and still more when, seeing Constance's eyes closed, she grew courageous enough to wander about the room full of pleasant lights and shadows, keeping time to the music with little tripping steps and fancying pleasant fancies. If one were a princess, for example, living in this house, and if its owner were a prince with a face majestic and kind, like the one that had looked at her over a deep lace collar from the opposite wall during dinner, and if by some painless process all the quivering heart-strings that linked one to the thickening trouble at home were severed, so as to leave room for pleasure and delight to flow in, then to be sure—but no, Emmie's heart was too tender and loyal to allow her to take more than a minute's pleasure in even a fancy that cut her off from sharing the family pain. A vision of her mother's face, looking sad when she was not near to comfort her, pulled down her castle in Spain before it was half built, and sent her back humbly to the piano, to watch Alma's hands during her skilful playing, for the chance of carrying home some hints to Mildie that might aid that ambitious young person in her determination to become, among a few other things, a first-rate pianist.

The gentlemen entered from the dining-room while the final chords were sounding, and Mr. Austice stopped

by the piano and began to talk to Emmie, inquiring after Katherine Moore, and referring to the night of the accident, and to one or two late visits to Saville Street, where, as it seemed to Alma, who kept her seat on the music-stool, and heard every word that passed, he had made himself very familiar in a very short time. It was always his way, and always with the wrong sort of people, she thought disapprovingly. After a while she found an opportunity for interrupting the conversation to ask a question she had intended all the evening to put to Wynyard, though she had kept it till nearly the end, not to seem too eager on the subject.

“Have you heard of the great doings we are to have at Golden Mount for Christmas and the New Year?”

“Golden Mount—do I know the place?”

“Yes, yes; you do perfectly well; and what is more, I happen to know that you have had, or soon will have, an invitation to spend Christmas week there. Golden Mount is the country house in Kent, close to Longhurst, that the Kirkmans have lately bought, and almost rebuilt in splendid style. Mrs. Kirkman knew mamma long ago, and since their rise in the world, and their becoming our neighbours in the country, they have rather thrown themselves on us for advice. They have asked mamma to manage their house-warming for them, and it is to be

on a scale of magnificence, such as only suddenly-made millionaires ever think of indulging in. I can't help being curious about it, for people say that the house, and above all the new conservatories and winter gardens, are curiosities of perfection. Mamma is closeted with Mrs. Kirkman to-day, writing invitations and making plans, and we have promised to stay on throughout a whole fortnight of *fêtes*."

"I hope you will enjoy it."

"You will have the opportunity of judging how far we succeed in making it enjoyable; but you must not flatter yourself that you owe your invitation, when you receive it, to our suggestion. Mr. Kirkman wrote down your name himself, and it is due to his admiration of your talents, of which it seems he has had proof in some way or other."

"Admiration indeed! The scoundrel! He must be more vulnerable, however, than I supposed, if he thinks it worth his while to try to stop a small growl like mine, by throwing a bribe at me."

"You are not at liberty to call my friends names, if you please."

"You don't know what you are doing when you call such a man as that your friend. You don't know what he is, as I happen to do. You have no idea of how

he has made this money you talk of helping him to spend."

"Of course I have not; it is no business of yours or mine. His wife is a kind motherly old woman, who is fond of mamma, and since this fabulous fortune has, one way or another, got into the hands of people who don't know how to enjoy it, I consider we are doing good service to society by showing them how to make it useful. There are plenty of people, I can tell you, with more right to be fastidious than you or I, who will keep us in countenance only too gladly."

"What do you consider gives one a right to be fastidious in such a matter—more or less honesty, more or less dislike to divide the spoil with the spoiler, or what?"

"I won't have you wax eloquent; there is no occasion for it. It is quite a simple question. If one is never to share in entertainments unless one can account to one's own satisfaction for the money that pays for them, we shall have to keep pretty well out of the world."

"Exactly!" This was said with a playful smile, and a slight imitation of the tone so often heard at dinner, and was meant to atone for the over-gravity of his last speech; but when Alma's face did not relax, Wynyard added: "Yes, it is exactly as you said, one has to keep pretty well out of *that* world."

“But I have told you mamma and I are going into it, and that you may spend a week with us there if you like. Not that we shall be in any want of pleasant company.”

There was a little pause, and then Wynyard said:

“I am glad to know that I shall not owe my invitation to a kind suggestion from anyone belonging to you. In that case I should have found it very difficult to refuse.”

“Why should you refuse Mr. Kirkman?”

“I can’t help myself. Look here, this packet that I am going to post on my way home to-night contains a magazine article, the third of a series I am writing to expose the sort of dishonest speculations by which Mr. Kirkman, among others, has gained his sudden wealth. His name is not mentioned in it, but I had him in my mind at every sentence, and it was some private knowledge of a shady proceeding of his which set me on to write as I am doing. How should I feel, do you think, reading this in proof next week at his breakfast-table? About as honest as I consider my would-be host, or indeed rather less so.”

“If that is all, give the letter to me instead of posting it; I suppose a writer can’t be expected to burn his own manuscript, but he would not feel any sympathetic agony, would he, while another person put it into the fire? You can write three or four of these things in a month, I

suppose ; *one* cannot be of so much importance to you, can it—as—I don't say the pleasure of spending a week with old friends, but as abstaining from giving papa another reason for thinking you impracticable ? He has no scruple about visiting Mr. Kirkman, why should you have any ?”

Alma rose from her seat as she spoke, and approaching Wynyard, held out her hand to take the letter.

Emmie had been listening anxiously ever since Mr. Kirkman's name—which carried painful home associations with it—came into the talk, and now a strange fear of seeing the paper move to meet Alma's fingers possessed her. In her eagerness, she felt as if some momentous result, involving the triumph of the man who had ruined her father, over new victims, hung on Alma's getting her way, and she only just restrained herself from putting her hand on Mr. Anstice's arm to hold it back.

“Don't, Alma,” she cried vehemently. “Let the letter go. I have heard mamma say that Mr. Kirkman deceived papa, and helped to ruin him long ago. It is only right that people should know and be warned in time. Let the letter go, Alma.”

Both Alma and Wynyard, who had forgotten Emmie's near neighbourhood altogether by this time, were startled

by the interruption, and surprised at the eagerness of the blushing face on which they turned to look at the same moment.

Emmie would be overwhelmed with shyness at the mere recollection of the part she had acted by-and-by, but for the present, shyness was burnt out by a stronger feeling.

“Ask mamma about Mr. Kirkman,” she went on eagerly, “or Harry; he knows, and will tell you. Ask them what they think before you decide, dear Alma.”

“Had I not better get them both an invitation to spend their Christmas at Golden Mount?” answered Alma, with something very like a sneer on her beautiful trembling lips, for she felt her cause was lost, and knew how sorry she should be when her anger was over.

“Oh, Alma!”

“Well, why not? The change of air and amusement would do them good, and it would be a sensible way of turning Mr. Kirkman’s profusion to good account. A better thing than railing at him, I maintain. You cannot persuade me that the national morality will suffer from his having a guest or two more or less at his Christmas parties, any more than it would have suffered from the suppression of the paper you are putting back into your pocket, I see, Mr. Anstice.”

“We are not concerning ourselves about *public* morality that I know of,” Wynyard answered a little coldly; then, approaching her and lowering his voice so that only she could hear, he added: “I thought you were above bribery—and such a tremendous bribe as that one to me—a week with *old friends*, I think you said,—well, my comfort all through my solitary week will be to know how you would have despised me if I had accepted it.”

“Not at all. I was in earnest at the moment, but now I really think you had better not go. People who feel differently on almost every subject had better keep out of each other’s way. You have lately, it seems, grown accustomed to such very intellectual society in the Saville Street attics—‘Air Throne,’ I believe my cousins call it—that anything terrestrial must appear very low-minded indeed to you. We shall each, no doubt, enjoy ourselves equally among our new friends and forget all about old ones.”

“Speak for yourself,” said Wynyard, quickly. “I shall have no gaieties to put recollections of past Christmases out of my mind. Must I really keep them all to myself this year? Shall you not be able to spare a poor quarter of an hour even at the end of the year for a glance back to the days when we did not feel differently on almost every subject—as you profess we do now?”

Alma turned back to the piano to collect her music at this, and though Wynyard followed and stood beside her for a minute or two, affecting to help her, he got no answer whatever to his question. If she had spoken what was in her mind she would have retaliated on him with another query. How could she believe in the sincerity of regrets for past happiness when opportunities for making it present were so lightly thrown away—for a mere scruple? What better could she do than drown all thoughts of the refusal that hurt her pride so deeply, by entering with all the zest she could command into splendours and gaieties which he might have made so much more than empty shows for her? She mentally registered a resolve so to drown her pain, and though perhaps there might have been a relenting if she had looked up and seen the eyes that watched her—pleading for another word or two—the opportunity for further conversation did not occur. Her father came to the piano, before she had finished tying up her music, to tell her that their carriage was announced, and to beg her not to keep it waiting, as he had arranged with Constance to send Emmie on to Saville Street in it when it had dropped them at their own door.

Emmie was too full of her own relief at being informed by the servant who brought her cloak that her

other belongings had already been placed in her uncle's carriage, to notice the formal hand-shake, given without the least upward glance on either side, with which Alma and Wynyard Anstice parted.

CHAPTER VIII.

SPIDERS' AND NORNIR'S THREADS.

Much like a subtle spider which doth sit
In middle of her web, which spreadeth wide;
If aught do touch the utmost thread of it,
She feels it instantly on every side.

Our souls sit close and silently within,
And their own web from their own entrails spin.

“SPINSTER, fairy spinster, don't hinder your sister's spinning any longer; I want the money I am spinning out of my head quite as much as you want the gold and silver fly wings your threads are to catch; let me go on with my thread now, little idler.”

“Idler!” echoed Katherine Moore from an arm-chair by the corner of the fire, where she was lying back watching her sister at work before her easel, with the placid content of a convalescent in seeing others busy. “Idler, indeed! if I could put myself into the spider, would not I retort on you? I have been watching you

both for a whole quarter of an hour, and you know you mean to sweep away all the delicate threads it has woven between the top of your brush and your paper in a minute or two. I wonder you have the heart to let it waste its work, seeing it has to come out of its body, as yours out of your brain."

"It is play," said Christabel, "not work. She knows very well, this clever little spinster, that there is no stable place for a useful fly-catching web at the corner of my easel. It is just a day-dream of impossibly delicious flies she has been indulging in this afternoon, not solid work, and meanwhile we spinsters have been having a good deal of talk with each other on our methods of spinning, and she has given me some useful hints. Now, by your leave, Mrs. Spider, I must pull down your castle in the air, I am afraid, and take you into a commonplace corner, where you will have to do real work. The afternoon is getting on, and I must finish my task in the short daylight. Neither you nor I shall get anything to eat by castle-building."

The window of the attic faced westward, and in these short winter days Christabel was glad of all the light she could get, that she might prolong her work to the last possible minute, for Katherine's illness had brought unlooked-for expenses, as well as thrown the burden of

keeping the common purse filled, entirely on her hands. Luckily there had been—was it by chance, or by some friendly contrivance—an influx of paying work in Christabel's line that could be done at home, and Christabel had never felt her invention so ready or her energy so untiring as in these last weeks. Was it really the end of the year, she sometimes asked herself; really the cold dead time that usually had a depressing effect on her quicksilver nature? It felt so much more like spring, so much more like the beginning of something—a dawn rather than a death of the year—that, lifting her eyes sometimes suddenly from work that was progressing well, she was quite surprised to catch sight of bare heads of trees powdered with snow in a distant square garden.

There had been two dreadful weeks, when Katherine lay in severe suffering and some danger, more from the effect of the blow on her head than from the broken rib, and when Christabel, during her day and night watching, had had the agony of meeting the beloved eyes so clouded with pain, that there was hardly any recognition of her in them. The loneliness of that time, when the soul on which her soul hung seemed shrouded away from her, had been terrible to Christabel. Was it wonderful that the giving back of the old happiness should seem a new era in her life, and make her whole world sweeter,

larger, more beautiful a thousand times, than it had ever appeared before? Christabel did not see any cause for surprise, only for endless delight in the enlarged capacity for work and enjoyment that had come to her; and Katherine's mind was too quiescent yet, from bodily weakness, to find more than a pleasant repose in acknowledging the new power and energy displayed by her sister in their time of need. Their evening talks had ceased since Katherine's illness, so that the elder sister really knew much less than formerly of what was passing in Christabel's mind. At first she had been too weak for much conversation, and since she had become stronger they had frequently had visitors in the evening. While Katherine lay back in her chair watching her sister, after she had drawn her easel closer to the window and fallen to work again, she fancied that she detected something in her looks that betokened an expectation of visitors to-night. What was it? Those bright knots of blue ribbon that showed to advantage among the ripples of her red-brown hair, a something in the dress, or an air of anticipation in her face, whose expression was certainly less still and indrawn than formerly? Then Katherine smiled at the turn her thoughts were taking, saying to herself that it would be a strange result indeed of their withdrawal from the world

if Christabel, whose habit it had been to shut herself up like a snail in its shell from all acquaintances in their old, young-lady days, should take to decking herself out for the fascination of old David Macvie and Mrs. Urquhart, or grow excited at the prospect of an invasion from downstairs by Harry West and his brothers in the course of the evening. No, it could not be that. It must be some unusually sweet fancy stirring within, that brought the gleam of a smile coming and going, the rosy glow like the brightness of coming day, to the dear face she was watching; and the pretty dress and bright knots of ribbon had no doubt been donned to celebrate their return to their old homely, lonely ways, and not in expectation of intruders. There had been a long interregnum, a melancholy interruption to all their plans, and for the first time during her recovery, Katherine's thoughts went back to the day of the accident, and she occupied herself in tracing out all the consequences that had followed upon it, till the last gleam of afternoon sunshine had passed away from the room, and Christabel was driven to the fire to warm her chilled fingers and rest for a few minutes, before beginning fresh work that could be done by lamplight.

“No, don't take your embroidery-frame just yet,” Katherine begged. “Half an hour of having you sitting

idle by my side will do me a great deal more good than all the nourishing things your extra work could buy for me. Come, I am well enough now to be Dr. Katherine again, and prescribe for myself, and I order myself an hour's happiness, which means the feeling your head resting against my knee and your hands lying idle in mine, while we talk as we used to talk. Come, here is your stool. How long it is since you sat resting, while I moved about the room, on that November night when we last went out together!"

"Yes," said Christabel, "we had been congratulating ourselves on the quiet lives we were leading, and the next thing that happens is a blow, not meant for you at all, that shatters our routine like a Venice glass, and carries us straight into quite a new order of things. Witness, that you are at this moment seated in Mrs. Urquhart's most comfortable arm-chair, and that, instead of there being a red-herring grilling on the fire for our supper, a dainty little dish will come up presently from the 'Land of Beulah,' with Dr. Urquhart's professional commands laid on you to eat it. Six weeks ago how impossible such circumstances would have seemed to us—as the result, too, of a man, whose name we don't even know, getting drunk and beating his wife."

"Threads," said Katherine. "I have been thinking

of that ever since you spoke to your spider. The grey and the gold, the smooth and the tangled, so twisted together that one cannot say whether it is a dark or a bright spot that is being woven into the web. To think that a blow aimed in hate should have brought such a flood of kindness about us ! ”

“ Let us go over it all, and tell out our mercies,” said Christabel. “ I feel just in the mood for that to-night. Do not let us leave anything out.”

“ I will begin then with old Mrs. Urquhart’s noble courage in putting aside her suspicions of me,” said Katherine, smiling, “ and venturing her darling son so freely in our dangerous society. I know it has cost her terrible pangs, and it is a real triumph of benevolence that she has not only borne her own sufferings without complaint, but spent her solitary evenings in planning alleviations for mine. She is a dear old heroine, and deserves the reward that will come by-and-by, when her eyes begin to be opened.”

“ Oh, oh ! ” cried Christabel ; “ you need not explain yourself ; our thoughts have leaped together. You have seen it, then ? ”

“ When I was too weak to telegraph my amusement across the bed to you. Does it not give quite a new sensation to be watching the dawn and progress of the first

real little love-story that has ever cropped up under our observation? I should have scolded Dr. Urquhart away many and many a time, when he has been spending an unnecessary half-hour with me, if I had not been so interested in observing the curious effect Emmie West's presence anywhere about the room, has in drawing him to the spot from whence he can best see her. I am making observations on a kind of electricity and magnetism hitherto unknown to me, and I don't think it is waste of time in a professional woman, all whose knowledge of the subject has to be gained from the outside."

"Emmie does not seem to notice the magnetism herself."

"No, and that is why it is such an interesting psychological study. I am watching to see when the consciousness on the other side will wake up, just as we watched for the green shoots to peep out from your bulbs last year, after we had put the hyacinth-glasses in the sun. As I am very careful, and determined to keep my observations strictly from everybody but you, I don't fear any counter-magnetism from my watching."

"You do not, then, wish to counter-magnetise?"

"Oh no; why should I? I have always thought highly of Dr. Urquhart, and our recent experience surely more than confirms first impressions. When the induce-

ment of ingratiating himself with Emmie West is largely allowed for, there is still a remainder of pure goodness in his conduct to us, and though I must not call myself even a regular student of medicine, yet I know enough to appreciate the high professional skill he has shown in his treatment of me."

"Oh, Kitty, Kitty!" laughed Christabel, "that is speaking like a professional woman indeed. Now I get a glimpse at the awful heights of reasonableness to which scientific training is to lift the female mind by-and-by. The notion of mentioning professional skill as a qualification for winning love, could only have occurred to an incipient M.D."

"I did not," said Katherine. "I only gave it as a reason for *my* thinking him worthy."

"Don't dwell on that reason before Emmie though, if you wish to repay Dr. Urquhart for curing you. She has not your devotion to science, and needs another sort of bird-lime, I imagine, to catch her fancy. Dr. Urquhart is doubtless an observing man, but I doubt whether he acted as cunningly as he supposed, in bringing his microscope up here on pretence of its being useful to you by-and-by. He won't win Emmie's heart by showing her rotifers. She is always thinking of something else while she looks through the lens, and Mildie is the only person

whose imagination is at all impressed by the wonders he descants upon so enthusiastically. Luckily there is another side of his character, and other deeds of his, with which Emmie will have more sympathy when she gets to know them. For example, his goodness in attending your poor woman through the brain-fever that came on when her wretch of a drunken husband was sent to prison for beating her and you; and—another little anecdote, which you shall have the pleasure of telling Emmie, since you declare yourself the doctor's partisan already. Do you remember the day of his second call, when you told me to offer a fee both to him and the surgeon who had set your broken rib, and I had to empty our poor purse of its last coin to make up the dreadful little white packets? I was not of course at all surprised when he pressed the one I offered him back into my hand, and said, with a fine smile, that doctors do not take fees of each other; but I had a shock when, after he had left the room, I took up the purse I had carelessly laid on the table and found a five-pound note folded neatly in one of the divisions. Those skilful long fingers of his, that look as if they were made to feel pulses, and put butterflies' wings under microscope-glasses without ruffling a feather, had managed this little manœuvre without my seeing what he was about; and, Kitty darling, that first fortnight, while you were so ill

and I had no heart for work, would have been a bad time for us if there had not been his little store to fly to."

"I wondered how you had managed, and meant to face the question of what debts we had incurred when I felt strong enough to bear it."

"Your brother-doctor is our only creditor, and I have already put aside something towards paying him back, and hope to make up the entire sum when I take my next batch of work to my employers. The trouble will be to think of some equally ingenious way of returning the note to him when we have it ready."

"I shall not take that trouble. I shall put the money back into his hand and look him full in the face while I thank him for lending it, and for all his other goodness to us. I don't want him to feel that there is any necessity for having recourse to delicate devices. That, to my mind, would be confessing we were ashamed of the struggle we had entered upon, and wanted to be looked at in some other light than *workers*, ready to take the ups and downs of a life of struggle, and to receive help from our fellow-workers as freely as we hope to render it by-and-by."

"Well, then, I will leave you to educate Dr. Urquhart into your notion of male and female comradeship in professional duties. I am afraid I am backsliding into a depraved taste for the little delicacies and shy devices that

aim at throwing something of poetry over our obligations to each other. It is old David Macvie, however, who is spoiling me. What do you think of his having walked, I dare not think how many miles out of London, twice a week, to get fresh eggs for you, from a farmhouse in the country where he once lodged? He brings them back packed in moss, and looking fit to paint. He could get them nearly as good from any shop close at hand, without any trouble; but then there would not have been the same excuse for offering them to us, and he would have been afraid of hurting our feelings. Do you object to that? Would you rather he presented us with two shillings a week, as he would certainly do to a fellow-journeyman who had met with an accident, and knocked off his work?"

"Dear old David! what can we do for him when I am well again?"

"I plead for little womanly devices. See, I am embroidering him a splendid smoking-cap, to wear in the evening when he sits with his back to that draughty door. It won't match well with his snuffy coat and his old Scotch wig; but he will delight in wearing it, I know."

"I will leave David's recompense to you; there is no fear of his misunderstanding us; but I see a great many fresh things about the room, which don't to my mind look

like the Urquhart belongings, and which certainly never came from the West region of the house. That basket of ferns, and the litter of books, patterns, and engravings round your easel—can David be responsible for them all?”

“I wonder you don’t see whom they are like; but now that we have you in the sitting-room again, you will learn the new comers and goers your illness has brought about the place. The basket of ferns came this morning before you were awake, and it was Mr. Ralph Anstice who left it at the door; the gentleman who carried you out of the crowd, Kitty, and who has been several times to ask after you since.”

“I seem to remember several bouquets of flowers that came to my bedside when I was ill. Were they all from the same quarter? It was kindly thought of.”

“Was it not? I class the flowers with David Macvie’s moss baskets—the careful-useless presents that one values especially, because they have cost the giver more thought than money. Just look at these monthly roses, and at the branch of arbutus among my ferns, and the trailing ivy sprays round the handle of the basket, and the hips and haws which make one feel as if one had a bit of a Devonshire hedge-row in the room. They did not come out of a London flower-shop. Someone has walked a long way to gather them for us. Shall I shock you,

Kitty, by confessing that I have backslided into helpless young ladyhood so far as to like that people should take a little trouble for us, as a change, darling, while you are ill? We will go back into being independent trouble-takers by-and-by."

"I see you have been making a study of the arbutus branch and the ivy for one of your drawings. I am not disposed to quarrel with anything that helps you now you are working so hard."

"It was an understanding piece of help, such as one can't but be grateful for. I was grumbling over my work yesterday, and saying that I had come to an end of my copies and my invention, and early this morning came these beauties to give me fresh inspiration, and make to-day's work a thorough feast."

"Did not you tell me one day that this Mr. Anstice was an artist himself? I suppose that is how he comes to know what to send you."

"I fancy he is an artist, but I don't remember that he exactly said so. His name is Raphael, though he says most people call him Ralph, and he told me once that drawing was his only gift. I don't think he has done much with it yet, however. He said that he and his cousin were discussing his next step in life, that very evening when he first saw us. He speaks as if, like our-

selves, he had very few friends, and I suspect that he is a sort of poor cousin of the elder Mr. Anstice, partly perhaps dependent on him."

"You seem to have got to know a good deal about him in a few short visits."

"We have talked a little, it is true; he came up here on one of the first days after you began to mend, when I was in a peculiarly happy sympathetic mood, and it was then that he told me about himself. After a bit, I, for once in my life, grew communicative in my turn, and it was odd the number of coincidences in our early experience that kept coming up. I made out plainly that he had been the same sort of snubbed uncomfortable child that I was, and with no Kitty to stand up for him, only a clever popular cousin who occasionally condescended to stretch out a patronising hand. It was quite delightful to me to meet a person who looks back to childhood with even greater horror than I do, and who can sympathise with me in my utter disbelief in the popular notions about it."

"Ah, you have got a long way indeed beyond me in this acquaintance. I recollect seeing your artist, certainly. I recollect his coming into the next room to speak to me, but my impression of him does not somehow fit in with what you are saying."

"You shall study him now, then, till you get the right impression," said Christabel, drawing a portfolio towards her, and taking out a sheet of paper, and holding it up before Katherine's eyes. "There, look at him by fire-light. I don't call it exactly a likeness; but one day Emmie West encountered him here, and after he had left we chanced to speak about his being an artist, and called Raphael, and *à la* West she nicknamed him the 'Affable Archangel' on the spot. Don't sneer at her, Kitty, she is a little bit of a school-girl still, I allow, but my pencil was working away all the time she talked, and here it is, you see, a recollection of Perugino's picture of 'Tobit and the Angel,' with the face I saw protecting you in the crowd between the angel's crimson wings. What do you think of it?"

"You have put a great deal more in this face than there is in the real one, but I suppose you meant to do that. You say it is not a likeness."

"*More* do you say? As if I were artist enough for that! Kitty, you are not going to set up a pair of independent eyes on the score of having had your head broken lately. I forbid that; we have always seen alike till now, and I can't let you do anything else."

"I promise at all events that as soon as we have lost sight of the real Raphael Anstice, I will try to remember

him like the 'Affable Archangel' of your picture. It will throw a halo over the disagreeable sights of that evening, if I can remember him in such guise."

"Give me back my drawing; I am going to light the lamp and get out my embroidery to punish you for your bad criticism."

"You are not really vexed with me, darling?"

"Oh no; but I thought we were to count out our new-found pleasures, and we have hardly begun when you talk as if they were all to slip away from us immediately."

"To leave us, as the interruption found us, perfectly content with our work and each other,—independent of outsiders. Won't it be so, dear? Is not this what you are looking forward to? There will be gratitude of course due to those who have helped us through this strait; new links with the outside world, perhaps, but nothing that touches the real core of our lives."

Christabel was busied in tying the strings of her portfolio, and did not answer, but neither did she get out her work as she had threatened. She wandered about restlessly, after she had lighted the lamp, arranging her ferns and ivy in different parts of the room, and pausing before the window every now and then to peep through its white blind into the street far below, more

than usually thronged that evening with passengers intent on Christmas purchases, or hurrying to places of entertainment. Presently she went into the inner room and came back with her hat and cloak on.

“I have such an overpowering wish to go out, Kitty,” she said. “You won’t think me unkind, dearest? Mrs. Urquhart is coming up to spend the evening with you, and I don’t feel quite in the mood somehow to sit still and hear her talk. I have only been out twice since you were ill, and a raging thirst for fresh air and movement has been upon me ever since that bit of hedgerow walked into our room this morning. I have been keeping it down with a strong hand all day, telling myself there was nothing pleasant to be seen out of doors, but now the lamplight and the hurrying people seem to promise something, and I feel I must go.”

“You can’t wander about alone in the dark.”

“But I can go to David Macvie, and coax him to come out with me. Even the short walk to his house and the sight of his clocks will do me good. I want to feel myself an independent out-of-door woman again. Besides, there are purchases to be made for Christmas Day. We did it together last year, don’t you remember? I must console myself for being alone by hitting upon some nice little surprises for you. You will let me go?”

Katherine put her hand over her eyes, and a nervous quiver passed over her mouth as she remained silent a moment, then she looked up.

“I did not know my nerves had been so shaken. It will be a struggle, I see, but I must conquer in it, or all I have done hitherto to prepare myself for the training I aspire to, will go for nothing. At any rate, I will not turn my unfortunate adventure into a bondage for you, and force you back into a useless woman because I can't bear you out of my sight without a legion of protectors. I will trust you with David.”

“Or without him when it is necessary,” said Christabel, stooping down to kiss the tremor out of the pale lips. “Think of the hundreds of girls who are setting forth in London on this same errand to-night, carrying back little bits of work for payment, and plotting as they go, how to make the most of their money. Why should I come to more harm than any one of them? I can't waste daylight in shopping at this time of year, and purchases must be made sometimes.”

“Yes, dear, you are right to go; David will delight in the shopping. Mind you leave all the bargaining to him, and bring him back to this door with you. I know it is foolish to have a terror of that dark crossing in the shadow of the railway bridge, but I am afraid I shall

be picturing you there incessantly till I have you safe at home again. Well, perhaps I shall be all the better physician for women for having had a good wrestle with nerves myself."

They were still talking and holding hands preparatory to parting, when Katherine felt a twitch in Christabel's fingers as if an electric shock had gone through her, and immediately afterwards there came the sound of a man's step on the stairs, followed by a knock on their door.

"Who can it be?" said Katherine, "it is too early for Harry West or David Macvie, and Dr. Urquhart was not to come again to-day."

"I think it is the 'Affable Archangel,'" whispered Christabel, with a smile and a glow on her face; "he said something about calling once again to bid us good-bye before he left London, and he may want to know if the ferns reached me safely. Shall I tell him you are up, and not well enough to see visitors, or may he come in for a few minutes just for you to judge of the likeness, Kitty?"

A second louder and rather impatient knock interrupted the whisper, and, on a sign from Katherine, Christabel went to the door, and opened it to admit a tall young man holding a great bunch of evergreens in

both hands. In his eagerness to greet Christabel, and the confusion of entering the lighted room from the dark passage, he knocked his head against one of the low beams near the door, and scattered the greater part of his offering at her feet. The little commotion that followed in gathering up the sprays, covered any shyness there might have been in Christabel's welcome, given for the first time under Katherine's eyes, and prevented Katherine from making hers as formal as she had, at the first moment, intended it should be. She was prepared to look very critically on this suddenly-made intimate of Christabel's, but when, after a short delay, the tall figure stepping over some scattered branches of holly that had rolled on to the hearth-rug, approached her chair with an exclamation of cordial satisfaction at seeing her up, she could not help acknowledging to herself that there was real kindness and sweetness in the eyes that beamed down upon her, and she answered in her own natural cordial tones, free from *empressement*, and free from shyness :

“ You and I seem fated to preface our meetings with blows on the head ; I hope yours has not suffered from your ignorance of attic roofs as severely as mine did the last time we met.”

“ Not at all ; and you must not, if you please, accuse

me of ignorance of attics, for I assure you, that taking all the hours of my life together, a large proportion of the best of them have been spent under the roof. I used to vote the attics at home the only enduring part of the house, and they were not to be compared to these of yours. Why, this room is magnificent; you might get a regiment into it."

"Of tin soldiers," said Christabel, laughing. "It must have been a reminiscence of those old battles with steadfast tin soldiers fought under the roof you told me about, which made you say that; though, judging by the quantity of 'Christmas' you appear to think we require for our decorations, you must indeed have got into your mind a grand idea of the space we occupy."

"Will these things be in your way, then? You can burn them, you know, if you don't care for them; only you said something about wanting branches of trees to copy, and I was afraid you might not find anything good enough among those I sent this morning. Look here!" stooping down to pick up something that lay on the floor under a branch of laurestinus, "I hit upon this when I was looking round, and I fancied you might think it worth having."

This was a beautiful pale yellow tea-rose, with an

abundance of shining leaves, that must have cost a gardener some trouble to produce in such perfection in mid-winter.

Christabel took it in silence from the hand that offered it to her, and laid the blossom against her face, breathing its odours in a sort of quiet ecstasy, while Katherine praised the size and beauty of the flower, and ventured a little wonder as to where it had come from.

“I, in point of fact, hit upon it ; I generally do find what I want if I look about me,” was all the satisfaction she got, uttered in a tone of languid complacency that made her feel Christabel’s theory of the poor cousin more difficult to hold than ever. Could this elegant-looking young man possibly belong to the Bohemian artist class they had read about—whose manner of life had, she knew, a certain vague attraction for Christabel ; and, if so, was this new acquaintanceship on which, for the first time in her life, she seemed to be entering eagerly, a good thing for her ? Katherine so shrank from the possibility of a breath of difference in opinion arising between herself and Christabel, that she hastily ordered herself not to be prejudiced, and tried to listen complacently to a desultory artistic-sounding conversation that now arose about the pretty effects of the firelight on the dark

holly leaves and the laurel boughs, which Christabel had gathered into her lap, and was nursing tenderly.

Before all the evergreens were discussed and disposed of about the room to the satisfaction of the two artists, who found something to say about every leaf and spray, Mrs. Urquhart's servant appeared with a tray of good things for Katherine's supper, and a message that Mrs. Urquhart herself would follow shortly to ascertain that justice had been done to her fare. Christabel's intention of paying David Macvie a visit and asking his escort for a shopping expedition was now again referred to, rather to Katherine's disappointment; and their visitor began to look for his hat, which had rolled off into a dark corner after his encounter with the beam. He stood with it in his hand by the door, while Christabel stooped over Katherine once more to ask if there was anything she could do for her before she left her.

"If David Macvie should be out," Katherine began.

"Now, Kitty, you have promised me not to be nervous; you are not to think of me again till I come back when my business is finished. You will try to be reasonable, won't you?"

"Especially as I shall have the pleasure of walking with your sister to the watchmaker's door, and putting her under Mr. Macvie's charge before I leave her. I will

not let her get knocked down in a crowd, I promise you," said a voice from the door.

"It is not our usual habit to want people to take care of us," said Katherine, falteringly. "We are accustomed to walk through the streets and do our own business without any help, and generally we prefer it."

"Poor Kitty," said Christabel, putting her hand on Katherine's forehead and feeling how the temples throbbed. "You are so troubled just now you hardly know what you wish, and you are making yourself worse by struggling with your fears. Come now, I am not the least bit afraid of going anywhere alone, as you know, but I will be magnanimous and let myself be taken care of across that haunted corner just for once, to spare your nerves."

"And, indeed, Miss Moore, you may depend on me for *taking care*."

Katherine's eyes were shaded by Christabel's hand at the moment, so that she did not see the look that stole involuntarily under Christabel's eyelids towards the door as the unusual words "taken care of" passed her lips, or the electric glance that answered it. She might have been a little startled if she *had* seen; as it was she tried to be content, and held out her hand cordially to thank Mr. Anstice for his consideration to her foolish sick-room

terrors, which no one would have blamed more than herself a few weeks ago.

The next minute she was alone, listening to quick, light steps retreating down the passage, and scolding herself for the contradictory unreasonableness which made her unwilling to let her sister go out alone, and yet grudged her being indebted to anyone but herself for protection. What depths of suspicion and jealousy was she not sinking into? She fought this second battle with herself over her solitary dinner, and when Mrs. Urquhart came up half an hour later she found her patient looking pale and tired indeed, but sitting more upright in her chair than she had hitherto been able to do, and occupied with a task of intricate mending which she had set herself by way of antidote to uncomfortable thoughts when left to her own devices. The sight of the thin fingers busied with this womanly work warmed the old lady's heart towards Katherine, and scattered the last remnants of the prejudice she had been gradually losing her hold on through her six weeks' nursing. She began to think that perhaps there might be some mistake, and that this patient-looking woman with the quiet eyes and grave lips, who doubled down the edges of the patch she was fitting, deftly, could not have the heterodox opinions about woman's position and duties that had been attributed to

her, by slanderers no doubt, or at all events that she would be ready to give them up when the right influence came. After ten minutes' observation of Katherine while she put in her even stitches, Mrs. Urquhart's old suspicion as to the person destined to exercise this saving influence awoke in her mind afresh, but now with softening reflections that mitigated its horror. After all, a woman who had known struggle, and who could put so much thought and heart into the business of converting two old flannel skirts into one new one, might (once she was disabused of wrong notions) prove a more satisfactory daughter-in-law than one of the ball-loving young ladies, whose false plaits and paint were a constant scandal to her honest old eyes.

"My dear," she began, in a cheerful tone, "I had no notion you were such a clever needlewoman, and I must say I do wonder since you *can* do such nice womanly work so well that you care to attempt—hem—other things, my dear."

"Than sewing?" asked Katherine, smiling. "But there are so many to do that, you would not have me spend my life in needlework."

"Not only sewing, but, my dear, you know what I mean—the beautiful, homely things, the safe sheltered life of usefulness at home, that no woman looked beyond

in my day, that ought to be enough for the cleverest woman I think."

"Usefulness, yes," said Katherine earnestly; "but perhaps not always sheltered, or at home. Why should capacity for one sort of work be made a reason for not attempting others? Why should I not put the cleverness of my fingers to uses that tax other powers as well, if I chance to have them? Why, in short, should there be any work for clever fingers which mine must not attempt because they are a woman's?"

Mrs. Urquhart put down her knitting and stroked her chin with her hand, as she searched her brain for an answer to so many audacious questions in one breath.

"My dear," she said at last, her eyes twinkling triumphantly over her spectacles, "Graham was reading a book of travels aloud to me last night, and we came upon an Eastern proverb that pleased me very much, and that I put by in my mind for you. 'There is no use in trying to carry two pomegranates in one hand.'"

"I don't catch the thought quite. What do you mean?" asked Katherine.

"Perhaps I mean, being an old woman who has had some experience in living, you see, that it takes so much for us just to be *women*, that there is no use in our trying to be anything else as well."

"You don't say that about men though," said Katherine, after taking a moment for thought in her turn; "you don't insist that a man must be a man and nothing else."

"But, my dear, I have had some experience of men as well as of women in my long life, and I do think that there is always a danger of the second pomegranate—shall we call it—pushing the first out of the hand. Of a man growing to be nothing but a doctor, or a merchant, or a lawyer, and having all the real nature, the real manhood eaten out of him by the struggles and ambitions of professional life. If the woman by his side is not all a woman, I am afraid it would be worse for them both. There is need of one to stand out of the dust and see the sky clear overhead."

"But is that what we women do when we let ourselves be shut up to a narrower life than we are fitted for?" said Katherine, a good deal moved. "Don't you think there are other things besides the dust raised in the struggle and toil that may hide the sky from us? May we not be so cramped and bound that we never lift our eyes from counting the pebbles that hurt our own feet? Is there anything worse than spending one's life in eating one's own heart for want of something better to do?"

"There is always plenty for the right sort of woman

to do at home, as it seems to me, my dear, without seeking farther."

"Women with one kind of experience think so, I know, and they are often—forgive me for saying this—very hard on other women to whom fate has given quite another. Your experience is of course a great deal wider than mine, but I don't think it can have taken in the problem of such lives as my sister and I were leading before we came here, with nothing to do, nothing to hope for, and with a consciousness of power, not exceptional perhaps, but still power to do and be something that would make life worth living. If it had been affection that imposed inaction upon us we should have resigned ourselves perhaps, but the people who had the ordering of our lives, and who wished to pare them down to their own standard, did not love us or understand us in the least. They could not even make any use of what we had to give them. We were as much thorns in their sides as they in ours, for their whole energies and thoughts were given up to the task of seeming richer than they were, and for that business we had no capacity. Can you not imagine what it was to us to open our eyes as we grew up to the meanness, the utter falsehood of the lives we were all leading, and then when we heard of possibilities of noble living which other women were entering upon, are you surprised that we panted for

the chance as the thirsty pant for water, and that we took courage and broke quite away from our restrainers at last, and took our destiny into our own hands ? ”

“That depends, my dear, on whom the people were, you speak of—relations ? ”

“A step-aunt and cousins who had felt us to be burdens ever since we were thrown upon their charity, and who bitterly grudged every advantage of education which in desperation I clamoured for, because they felt every shilling spent in that way so much taken from their power of keeping up the outside show for which they lived. Their family pride and prejudices make them ashamed of the independent course we are taking now, and they dread our succeeding so far as that our names should be talked about, otherwise they are glad to be rid of us. Was I not right to take the risk of setting up for ourselves ? ”

“I acknowledge the hardship of such a life, but I think you would have done better to wait. Many lives begin hardly; mine was uneventful, and what you perhaps would have called circumscribed at first; but I just waited patiently where I was, and after a while change came naturally. Love opened a wider sphere to me, and I have always had plenty to do, and suffer, and enjoy since; and I don't quite believe myself that anything but

that will really give a woman what she wants, or put her in the way of doing the best sort of work."

"Even if what you say is true, since there are so many women to whom the change you are speaking about never comes, had they not better look out for the next best sort of work they can get hold of?"

"I think there is such a virtue in waiting. Something, perhaps not marriage, but something would have come to you without your seeking it, if you had waited."

"Weariness, and middle-age, and deadness of intellect would certainly have come to us, and what a stock-in-trade these would have been to begin the struggle upon! It is hard enough to find a fit sphere for active work with youth and energy on our side. No, I can't bear the thought of there being more and more women every year whose youth is to be spent in looking out for, and seeing pass by them, a chance that should come as an unsought election, a glad surprise, if it is to come at all. No, I am glad that Christabel and I are workers in the present, not waiters on chance any more!"

"I did not say anything about *chance*, and I don't despise even the waiters so much as you do, my dear. I come back like an old woman who can't argue to the point I started from, and say that if they are keeping fast hold of their one pomegranate, they are perhaps doing the best

work for themselves and others, the work nearest them. I can't help wishing that you had not looked so far out of the way for yours. Would it not have been wiser for you, so inexperienced and thrown upon your own counsels as you are, to have taken some humbler, more settled path to independence where many had been before, and where there would have been no question of your womanly right to enter? Why trust yourself where you must walk alone, and where perhaps you are not wanted? Why choose to cross a dangerous stream on uncertain stepping-stones?"

"I have chosen the work I believe I can do best, and that I am certain I shall love best. If I succeed, I shall have the joy of thinking I am making the road safer for other women who feel as I do. You need not pity me—I am no coward looking forward to an easy life; I know what sort of a lot I have chosen, and I am prepared for a great deal of misconception and privation, and for real suffering perhaps, before I come to a good end, and I believe I can bear it all."

"Ah, my dear, but you see it is so often not the kind of suffering one is prepared for that comes. But what am I doing? Croaking like an old raven to you, when I ought to cheer you. What will Graham say when he hears that I have let you talk till your face is flushed and your poor hands are burning again? I have shown myself

a very bad nurse, and shall deserve a good scolding from the doctor when I make my confession to him. I had better go away quickly now and send you a cup of tea; that will be better for you than any more talk, till your sister comes home.”

CHAPTER IX.

FORTUNATUS'S PURSE.

It runs (so saith my chronicler)
Across a smoky city ;—
A Babel filled with buzz and whirr,
Huge, gloomy, black and gritty ;
Dark-louring looks the hill-side near,
Dark-yawning looks the valley,—
But here 'tis always fresh and clear,
For here—is Cupid's Alley.

THE hour which Katherine found long, to Christabel flew past in golden moments ; far too short in the passing, yet each moment holding some pleasant incident, if only an unforgettable look or word, that would make the time appear strangely long when memory counted over its treasures. The frost had broken a day or two ago, and a strong, soft west wind was blowing, bringing a sensation of freshness even into London streets, and suggesting visions of wide bare fields over which it had passed, and of trees tossing their arms and groaning out winter music in woods far away.

"It was a wind that did not belong to London," Christabel said, as she put up her veil at the first street corner they came to, and turned her pale cheek to the freshening of the breeze. After her six weeks of indoor life and hard work, the soft air blowing on her face seemed to enter into her with an electric shock of gladness, and exhilarate her, as if it were a real elixir of life. After a moment's silence, she turned round to her companion for sympathy with a smile of almost childish delight.

"I am glad that Katherine let me come out to-night. There—I have thrown off a ton's weight of weariness in that moment's rest. Generally the wind itself is tired out before it ever gets to our corner, and can only blow one about and whisper fretful complaints in our ears, but this wind is a young giant, and carries floods of music and rest on his wings. I did not rightly know how tired I was till this rested me. Now I am ready for anything, and snap my fingers at fatigue for all the year that is coming. Let us hurry on to David Macvie's, that I may finish my business and get back soon to Katherine!"

"There is no need for hurry, is there? It is quite early yet. The good people in this part of the world are only beginning to come out and amuse themselves and make their purchases, while the West End folks are dining.

You ought to come out oftener as you like it, and it does you so much good."

"Before Katherine was ill, we did go out every day, but it was all hurrying to and fro, with the consciousness that we were waited for at the other end of our walk. Did you ever give drawing lessons?"

"I? No—that is to say I've never been lucky enough to get any pupils as yet."

"Then you don't yet know how teachers are looked at when they arrive a few minutes late. It's a look that stings one all over one's face like a blow with a bunch of nettles; and a walk is hardly a walk with the expectation of that as a punishment for lingering. I stood still to feel the wind just now, by way of convincing myself that no one was waiting for me."

"Then let us stand still again as often as you please and walk slowly. There is no hurry, you know; we shall find ourselves at the clockmaker's long before we wish; at least I know I shall."

"If it is not keeping you from any appointment, or anything you have to do?"

"I have nothing on earth to do but, as you said just now, take care of you on that dark crossing your sister does not like."

"To-night she does not like it, but she will not think

about it when she is strong, and we get back to our usual life again; we are too busy people, I assure you, to give way to fancies."

"I can't bear to think of your having to work so hard; women ought not to have to work."

"Hush! that is dreadful heresy; Katherine thinks it our chief privilege and glory, and will not endure that there should be a possibility of hardship we don't claim a share in. She would feel herself insulted if you said that to her."

"Well, you see, I can't say I consider work a privilege myself, and as for hardship—one sees a woman sometimes for whom one cannot endure the thought of it; one would like to pave a road with jewels for her to walk upon, it is the only thing that seems fit for her."

"Katherine and I don't belong to that order of women then," said Christabel, lowering her eyes to avoid a too meaning look, which however brought a still deeper glow to the cheeks the wind had brightened. "We have taken to rough paths of our own free choice, and we find a great deal there to compensate for the sharp pebbles and puddles we sometimes come across."

"That puts me in mind of something you said once before. Stay, it was just here, close to the lamp-post we are passing now. I daresay you have forgotten, but I

never shall. You looked round at your sister just here, and said London fogs were sweet to you, and that you were glad to be in them. I was passing and overheard, and I thought I would give a great deal to be able to ask you what you meant. I did not know all that was to come of it."

"You saw us before the accident? You followed us into the crowd?"

"Yes, that was when I saw you first, just here where we are standing now."

"Just here."

An electric thrill passed through Christabel as she repeated the words. She saw the crowd again swaying backwards and forwards over the spot where Katherine had fallen, and one figure, with a face that had looked to her like the bright face of a rescuing angel, pressing onward, intent only on her safety. He had followed them then with the purpose of saving, and just here the first impulse to that protectorship she had begun to feel so constant and so strange, was born—just here. She looked up to the gas-lamp, down to the flickering square of light on the pavement where they stood, and almost involuntarily held out her hand. He took and pressed it silently, and then they walked on, still without speaking, passed the fateful crossing, and turned down the little

dark street where the watchmaker lived. He was surprised and perhaps somewhat taken aback at the sudden impulse that had led her to show her feeling of gratitude so frankly, he felt it had something in it a little beyond him, a little more highflown than he could quite understand, though nothing had ever so moved him, or made him feel so happy before in all his life. But to her, that hand-clasp under the gas-lamp in the crowded street was a solemn acceptance of a new power come into her life, vague in its requirements as yet, but a reality, capable of usurping the realm of her dreams, and reigning there as not even Katherine had hitherto reigned. When they reached the watchmaker's, they found that the shutters were up, and the shop-door closed, though it was still early. David had probably gone out to spend a cosy evening with a brother-entomologist, or to attend a meeting at his club, and Katherine's pupil, the consumptive young jeweller who occupied the upper story of the house, had left London when the cold weather set in. Christabel stayed her companion's hand when he was about to pull the bell impatiently a second time.

"There is no one in the house," she said; "I know the look of the place well enough when it is left in the guardianship of the clocks and the butterflycases. Ringing again would only bring out the heads of the two scolding

women who live next door on each side, and who might perhaps revenge their last quarrel with David, on us, by throwing cabbage-stalks at our heads. Well, it is a pity! I don't think the streets ever before looked so inviting for a stroll as they do to-night—but never mind. I can make some of my purchases on my way back to Saville Street, and I have already had a walk that has done me good. Thank you for it.”

“You are not dismissing me here; I never heard of such a thing,” cried Lord Anstice, stammering with eagerness. “Of course I shall see you safe home, for I promised your sister that you should not come to any harm, and how can I tell unless I see? And, besides, why are you in a hurry to go back? Your sister won't begin to expect you till the hour when you would have returned, if you had had a walk with the old man. Why should you go home earlier than you first intended?”

“No, Katherine won't expect me for another hour,” said Christabel; “it is very pleasant out of doors to night, and if you have nothing better to do——”

“I could not do anything that I liked better.”

They had reached the corner of the side street now, and Christabel stood for a moment or two irresolute, looking wistfully through the railway-arch towards a better quarter of wider streets and brightly-lighted shops

that lay beyond. Just outside the arch was the opening to the square,—whose trees, not snow-powdered now, but black and bare, could be seen from “Air Throne,”—and the broad road that followed stretched—a long vista of lessening lights and converging crowds, into a dim distance of mist and light. Christabel’s eyes dilated as she gazed, and when she turned them on her companion, they had still the dreamy, far-seeing look that made them so different from other eyes.

“Do you know,” she said, with the delightful smile expectant of sympathy which had hitherto been kept for Katherine alone, “I don’t know how it is, and I am half ashamed of it, but a scene like this moves me a great deal more than most country views, I don’t say than all, but beyond most that I have seen. If I ever paint a real picture—I never may, but if I do,—it will be something made up of light and darkness, stillness and movement, contrasts of life, such as you will see if you look down there.”

The spot to which she pointed was the space, half in bright gaslight and half in shadow, between the corner house of the square and the railing of its garden, which, in comparison with the thronged pavement of the main road close by, looked almost deserted. A ragged boy was standing in the circle of light made by the bright

door-lamp of the corner house, thrumming a guitar, while his companion, a little girl fantastically dressed, had seated herself on the lowest step of the house, and was resting her spangled head on one hand, the tambourine hanging uselessly from the fingers of the other. Farther back in the shade of the trees, a group of ragged children were dancing in time to the music; their uncouth gestures, and dingy faces and garments, making them look wild and spectral in the partial gloom in which they moved. As Christabel spoke, the girl on the doorstep sprang up, and holding the tambourine over her head, resumed her task—suspended for that one moment's rest—of twirling round and singing in a shrill, sweet, childish voice, that rose above the noises in the street, and reached to where the observers were standing.

“I know the tune,” Lord Anstice remarked a little indifferently, for Christabel's admiration of such a common bit of London life puzzled him. “I have heard it at theatres and places very differently sung; but she keeps the time wonderfully, and the voice is not bad for the open air.”

“It has spoilt it all to me,” said Christabel. “She was a picture a minute ago, and now she is a poor little tired child, singing for her supper, with very little chance

perhaps of getting a satisfactory one. Let us go and give her a penny."

This movement decided the question of Christabel's prolonged walk. When they had turned from the little singer—into whose tambourine Lord Anstice threw two pieces, that were not, as Christabel saw by the lamplight, brown pennies, but white half-crowns—they were in the main street, among the shops brightly lighted and decorated, and set out temptingly with Christmas gifts and Christmas cheer. The most inviting provision shops had not only their throngs of busy purchasers coming and going, but were besieged by lingering groups of wistful, hungry-eyed children and pale women, who hung about the windows to look with longing eyes on luxuries that were not for them, and who scattered whenever a voice of authority from within, or a policeman's step approaching without, warned them away. Into one or two of these shops Christabel turned to give brief orders, and make small payments, and brisk little interludes of conversation passed between herself and her companion as they waited for their turn, among the throng of purchasers, or hurried from one place to another. Christabel had hitherto hated the details of housekeeping, and left the dispensing of their slender funds to Katherine's skill, but to-night the little per-

plexities that arose from the necessity of proportioning the contents of the purse to the wants it had to satisfy, only exhilarated her, and when in the lightness of her heart she explained her difficulties to her new friend, and he volunteered astounding suggestions, which revealed profounder depths of ignorance on economic questions than her own, they laughed together over their mistakes like two children playing at responsibility.

“That is the last,” said Christabel, coming out of a grocer’s shop, where they had been longest detained, “and you see it is as well,” holding up a worn leathern purse that plainly showed its emptiness. “Katherine and I never get anything we can’t pay for at the time and we never need, this good little purse always has just enough in it; but tell me now, do you ever wish to be rich—on some such night as this, for example, when you are out making purchases, have you ever felt a burning covetousness enter your soul?”

“I don’t know. I used to wish awfully to be rich, but somehow or other, lately, I’ve got to think that perhaps there’s not so much in it as one fancies.”

“You’re right about ordinary riches. I never in my neediest moment wished for a settled income of so many hundreds or thousands or even millions a year. I am

quite well aware *that* is never enough, and always turns out to be a mere encumbrance. I have no faith whatever in riches that people know all about and expect you to spend properly: but Fortunatus's purse I should like to have. A purse with always a sovereign and a shilling in it is what I desire; and if I had it I am convinced that I should use it a great deal more sensibly than the shadowless man did. I should not pull out my money recklessly, so as to excite people's suspicions by the sight of heaps of gold. I should keep the purse close in my pocket, and go modestly about the world, feeling that I might spend my pound and my shilling on any fancy that came into my head, without owing the slightest responsibility about it to myself or anybody—there would always be another ready, and no second thought about my spendings should ever trouble my conscience. To-night, for instance, I would go into that crowd before the grocer's shop we have just left, and pick out the palest and most wistful-looking of those women and the shabbiest child, and I would take them back with me, and for once in their lives give them as much of every one of those good things they are devouring with their eyes, as they could carry home, *more* than they want. What a story it would be to them for the rest of their lives. One unstinted, undeserved piece of good luck,

coming they did not know where from, and leaving no obligation behind it. I should like, beyond anything else in the world, to go about sowing such stories—for once in my life at least. It would transport me into an Arabian night at once.”

“So it would! What a capital idea! It would be the best fun going. And I say, why should not we have Fortunatus’s purse just for to-night?”

Christabel turned round and stared at him. “Why should not we? What are you dreaming of? Are you by chance the little grey man—and have you got the purse in your waistcoat-pocket?”

For answer Lord Anstice thrust his fingers down into his waistcoat-pocket and drew out a small purse, which he held out to Christabel.

“Try it,” he said, imploringly. “Try if it won’t have a sovereign and a shilling in it as often as you give it back to me to-night. It would be the best joke that was ever acted; do try it.”

“What can you mean? You don’t suppose, do you, that I would give away your money in that reckless way? Of course I was only talking nonsense.”

“But I don’t think it was nonsense. You said it was what you would like beyond anything in the world. So why should not you have what you like on one

Christmas Eve? It won't do me any harm, I assure you. It's—in fact—a windfall that I meant to give away at Christmas—and I believe you've hit upon the very best way of doing it. I don't know what you feel, but I'm in an Arabian night already, and want to take as many other people into it as can come. There—that pale woman with the shawl over her head, and two ragged children hanging on to her skirts, why should not it begin with her? ”

Christabel could not keep her eyes from dancing with delight, even while her hand still hesitated to take the purse. To know that this strange feeling of having got out of herself and wandered into a magic world of dazzling delight was not unshared, added another spell, and made her feel that the only safe exit for her excitement was to pass the pleasure on to others.

“You are sure that you are serious, and intend what you are doing? You won't be sorry for it to-morrow, as I am sometimes when a Will-o'-the-wisp of a fancy beckons and I follow it? ”

“Not I. I shall look back upon it as one of the best things I have done in my life.”

“And there will still be another shilling and sovereign in the purse for yourself when you want them? ”

“Oh yes; you need not trouble your head about

that. I can make it a Fortunatus purse as far as a sovereign and a shilling go whenever I like."

"Ah, then you must really be a much better artist than I am, whatever you say of yourself," cried Christabel, looking up, with an air of respect that amused Lord Anstice intensely, at the broad forehead shaded by his wideawake, and then at the well-shaped, delicate hand that held out the purse to her. A true artist's hand, she said to herself, then aloud, "If you are really so lucky—but come into the shop with me, and see the delight on that woman's face which Fortunatus's purse is going to buy for us."

Lord Anstice, however, preferred to wait outside, pleading that it was better to avoid attracting the attention of bystanders, and that Christabel could flit in and out among the crowd, and act the fairy benefactor more easily alone. She came back to him when he had waited about ten minutes and was just beginning to tire, with a radiant face, and a look in her wonderful eyes turned upon him, that made him forget he had felt impatient.

"I slipped out of sight while the shopman was counting out the change into her hand. Let us turn down this side-street and lose ourselves in the throng round Punch and Judy as quickly as we can. I have heard all about her. She is a widow with eight children,

and goes out charing. She went so far as to remark that she 'had heard of angels,' when I put a whole pound of tea into her lap—but the other things, the oranges and savoury jelly for the child who is ill—and the lavish materials for to-morrow's plum-pudding for the other seven, reduced her to absolute dumbness, and when she finds me vanished, and has to go home with her five shillings change in her hand, her puzzlement will be as complete as we meant it to be. I know she will tell the six children she left locked up at home that she had a glimpse of wings underneath my cloak and heard them flutter just as she lost sight of me. Oh, and I did not forget the shilling, either. I slipped it into the hand of the eldest child to secure his falling in kindly with the angel legend. Fortunatus's purse is quite empty."

"Give it back to me then, and look about in the crowd to see who is to come next."

A hump-backed boy, poorly but decently clad, who, with a big basket in his hand, was hanging on the outskirts of the Punch-and-Judy crowd, took Christabel's fancy now.

"Tiny Tim shall carry the turkey home himself this year," she cried eagerly. "Leave him to me; I have a story ready about a sympathising friend who wishes to

send a token of respect and good-will to his parents this Christmas. Ah, there is my token—in the poulterer's shop opposite, tied up with rose-coloured ribbons. His basket is just big enough to hold it. I will catch him, and be back in a minute."

Tiny Tim visited a second shop, and acquired a warm comforter before Fortunatus's purse was exhausted. By the time it was returned to her again, Christabel had fallen in with a tribe of ragged urchins, mothered by a little woman of six, on their way to a sweet-shop to spend a halfpenny, and, after following them to their destination, and astonishing their small minds with undreamed-of abundance in the way of bulls'-eyes and toffy, she carried them off to a ready-made clothes shop over the way, and equipped them in warm jackets, capes, and hats, adding a shawl for mother, who was reported to be coming home from the hospital on Christmas Day. When she gave back the purse at the close of this performance, which had necessitated its being once carried back to its owner in the course of the bargain, and had triumphantly pointed out the transformed tribe trotting homewards, each clutching the other's miraculously whole garment with solemn looks of infantile amazement, it suddenly struck her that time had been passing, though she had not heeded it during these

exciting experiences, and that Katherine must long ere this have begun to expect her at home.

“Yes, it’s about time we escaped from these quarters,” Lord Anstice assented. “People are beginning to stare, and the next thing that might happen is our being taken up for passing bad money. Fortunatus’s purse would puzzle the policeman, and before we could make all clear your sister would have time to think I had fulfilled my promise of taking care of you very badly.”

“Let us make haste home, then, and I need not keep you, you know, after we have passed under the railway-bridge.”

“Do you think I can’t walk as fast as you, or must I tell you again that nothing you can say to me will make me give up a step of the way? I never enjoyed a walk so much in my life, and I have not so many pleasures that you need grudge me the fag-end of this one.”

Christabel was silent for a few minutes after this speech. The sentence, “I have not so many pleasures” went to her heart, and confirmed the delightful sense of comradeship that had given such zest to all the events of the evening. Her companion was, she thought, leading just the sort of life she had read of and dreamed about, and that she admired utterly—a generous, free-hearted, careless life—not from recklessness, but from that sense

of power to command ultimate success and distinction which supreme genius gives. Self-denying, too, in the midst of power, for it had few pleasures, and they were of this kind. When they had repassed the railway-bridge and were nearing home, she spoke again.

“Ours is not a pleasure that will come to an end when our walk is over; in fact it is, properly speaking, only just beginning now. Tiny Tim has hardly reached home with his basket yet, and our charwoman has not begun to tell her story to the six home children, for I feel sure she turned into a greengrocer’s on her way home to spend that five shillings on coals for to-morrow’s fire to boil the pudding. There are a good many people who will never forget this evening.”

“You may count me for one of them.”

“Yes, it has been a wonderful walk. I can do without another for a long time with this to think of.”

“But why should you do without another? Miss Moore, look here. I think your sister is right in not liking you to walk about by yourself.”

“But that is condemning me to no walks at all, and, luckily, it would be an impossible rule for me to keep. After the Christmas holidays I shall begin to give drawing-lessons again, and some of my pupils live a long way off,

on the other side of the park. I shall have walking enough then."

"So shall I. I am going into the country for a week or two on business, but when I am in town I walk about a great deal, and generally across the park. When we meet, it will give you a chance of prolonging your walks without your sister needing to be anxious. You'll let me do that for you sometimes, won't you, after taking such good care of you this evening?"

They had reached Mrs. West's house by this time, and Christabel turned on the doorstep to wish him good-night.

"I don't ask you to come in again," she said, "because it is late and Katherine is tired, but when you come back to London——"

"Precisely, I shall come and settle about those future walks."

"And Katherine will thank you for taking care of me on this one."

"I consider it a promise, however," said Lord Anstice as they shook hands.

Christabel's excitement died away into anxiety, and some doubt about the wisdom of her actions, when she found herself shut into the emptiness of the Wests' front hall. It was Casabianca who had opened the door for

her, and he proceeded instantly to enlighten her on various disagreeables consequent on her prolonged absence which he thought she ought to know.

“Oh, I say,” he began, “there have been people coming to the door from shops all the evening with parcels for you. They said you ordered ’em, and Mary Ann says you’d better keep a footman to open the door for your purchases, since you’ve grown too grand to carry ’em home yourself. She wonders who you expected to take ’em up to the attics for you.”

“I did not think they would come so soon,” said Christabel penitently. “I thought I should get home in time to ask you, Casa, to be on the look-out and take them in for me. It surely is not late.”

“Mary Ann meant to keep you standing half an hour at the door to punish you; but I dodged her,” continued the boy. “Yes, it’s pretty late. Mrs. Urquhart’s tea has come out of the drawing-room, and Mildie overheard her telling her maid to inquire whether you had returned and gone upstairs to Miss Moore. Mildie flatly refused to satisfy the old lady’s curiosity, I should have given it to her if she had; but, I say, another time you’d better take me out with you to carry home your things. It would be better fun for me than sitting in that stuffy school-room while Mildie does her physicks;

and I'd bring you home the back way and keep you out of scrapes with Mary Ann."

"Thank you," said Christabel, smiling, as she compared the different kinds of protection that it seemed just now to be her fate to have thrust upon her; "but where are my parcels? You have not let Mary Ann make away with them, I hope."

"Oh no, she only threw them into the lamp-closet, because she said she would not have lodgers' parcels lumbering about the hall; I'll fish them out for you in a minute and carry them up to the top of the house if you'll let me."

Christabel declined his company, under plea of wanting to get upstairs as quietly as possible, and she was conscious of feeling a little sneaky as she passed Mrs. Urquhart's door on tip-toe, to avert the danger of being assailed by the old lady with a shower of questions and remonstrances for having left Katherine alone so long. Had she really been neglecting Katherine for her own pleasure this evening? The strange thing was that a pleasure without Katherine should have been complete enough to make her forget.

If Christabel had been selfish she was punished, for she was not able to make the immediate atonement she had promised herself, of taking Katherine into her pleasure

by telling her all about it. Katherine's weary pale face, and the unwontedly querulous tone of her voice as she asked the cause of her long absence, showed that this was no time to begin a long story, a story too that Christabel felt she could only tell comfortably to sympathising ears in a mood to take its humours in good part. The tale of Fortunatus's purse must wait for another time, and live, as no dream even had ever yet lived, alone in Christabel's memory, without there being a reflection of it in Katherine's.

Christabel told herself that this disappointment was only one more added to the many troubles, great and small, caused by her sister's illness which had first made her know what it was to feel lonely; yet she was unreasonably depressed when she had to lie down by Katherine's side at night, with the unconfided events of the evening lying, as she fancied, like a tract of unknown country between them. The pain of this thought kept coming in and out among her dreams, and mixing in a fantastic way with recollections of the scenes of the evening, till she was recalled from uneasy slumber by the sound of the church bells ringing in the Christmas morning. She sat up in bed, resolved to shake off the vague discomfort to which she had awakened, and as she recalled the night visions to dismiss them, she hardly knew whether to laugh or shudder when she found that

the most persistent of them had been one in which she saw herself entreating the companion of her late walk, in the guise of the "little grey Master," to take back his purse in exchange for her shadow, with the loss of which she thought Katherine was reproaching her.

CHAPTER X.

TWILIGHT.

Forth from the spot he rideth up and down,
And everything to his remembrance
Came as he rode by places of the town
Where he had felt such perfect pleasure once.
Lo, yonder saw I mine own lady dance,
And in that Temple she with her bright eyes,
My lady dear, first bound me captive-wise.

CHRISTABEL MOORE'S one little bit of Christmas gaiety passed quickly, and for the present seemed to have left no trace behind it. The owner of Fortunatus's purse did not appear again in Air Throne, or make any further demonstration of himself by token or message, and the intimacy that had sprung up during the Christmas Eve walk began to wear a dream-like unreality in Christabel's recollection, as of something that could not possibly belong to the world of solid outside fact. The more so as Katherine had a slight relapse during the last week in the year, and showed such unwonted symptoms of despondency and anxiety about Christabel's doings, that

somehow or other (Christabel could not quite explain it to herself) the story of her Arabian night remained untold. It lay a weight on her conscience, that had never known a reserve from her second self before, and yet a treasure that seemed to grow more precious, more dazzling in dream-like beauty, every time she withdrew herself into the one unshared corner of her mind where its remembrance was stored, and allowed herself to live over its incidents one by one.

Otherwise the opening month of the new year was a trying time to the two sisters ; the first, since they had lived alone together, when their spirits had failed to rise higher than the difficulties that challenged them, and outside discomfort had been allowed to reflect itself within.

Katherine found the mental irritability and weakness attending on her slow recovery far harder to bear than the suffering of real illness, and could scarcely reconcile herself to herself in such a new state, even by regarding it as an enlightening experience for future use. Christabel was sometimes almost tempted to wish for the days back again when her patient lay passive in her hands, so difficult did she find it to restrain Katherine's eagerness to be at work again, without bringing up the depressing question of what was to become of them if two continued to eat while only one earned. Outside helps to forget

this vexed question came seldomer and seldomer. Even Mrs. Urquhart went away the day after Christmas Day to spend a fortnight with her married daughter in Devonshire, and the doctor took a fit of shyness or prudence, and, when professional visits were no longer necessary, sent up notes of inquiry by Casabianca, and was as seldom seen by the sisters as before Katherine's accident. The young Wests came and went as usual, but did not bring much brightness with them. Nothing particular had happened, Emmie explained, when questioned tenderly by Christabel to account for certain red circles that surrounded her pretty eyes once or twice when she came up to Air Throne—nothing new, but—well, it was the beginning of the year, and if Katherine and Christabel did not know what *that* meant in a family like theirs, it was hardly possible to explain. If she must say something, it meant—well, seeing mamma turn pale every time the postman's knock came at the door, and having it always in one's mind that one must be on the watch to intercept dreary-looking letters which, if they fell into papa's hands, brought a look into his face and a tone into his voice that, on account of the effect they had on mamma, must be kept back, at the expense of any amount of vigilance by the rest of the family. It meant, too, the sorrowful looking over of these missives with mamma.

at a safe time, and the making of all sorts of painful discoveries.

Emmie had not hitherto been very definite in her complaints to the Moores of home troubles, but one day about this time, when she came upstairs with a little glow of angry red on her cheeks that almost put out the traces of tears round her eyelids, she was moved to open her heart to them respecting a source of vexation and anxiety, that had only dawned on herself and Harry after long poring over this year's unpaid bills, though poor mamma had had it weighing on her heart for a long, long time. They (she and Harry) had discovered that papa was not to be trusted with money. No, she did not mean to say exactly that. Mamma would never forgive such words, and Katherine and Christabel must please pay no heed to them, only, alas! they were true. Papa, it seemed, never had, and, they feared, never would, leave off mixing himself up in speculations of the same reckless sort that had ruined him years ago, and in spite of all the experiences he had had, and of all his bitter disappointments, he would still, whenever mamma did not prevent him, keep back part of his salary from her, or intercept the rent of the drawing-room, to make a private fund to invest in some scheme which he always believed would enrich them this time.

“Of course it never does,” said Emmie, in a bitter tone that sounded strangely coming from such sweet lips. “Of course nothing does succeed when papa goes into it, and so of course it ends in our growing poorer and poorer, and having longer and longer unpaid bills for mamma to cry over every dreadful January. It is breaking mamma’s heart, and even Harry is angry with papa now that he understands the trouble clearly. You don’t know what a dreadful feeling it brings into the house when we find that Harry, whom we always looked to, to cheer us, is losing heart at last, so that all our poor little jokes have to be put away, and the school-room is as dull and silent as the other parts of the house. I wonder whether fathers and brothers quite know how hard it is for us women, who have been in the house all day waiting for the evening and planning comforts for them, when they come home too sad and tired to take any notice of what we have been doing? It seems to take all the pleasure and meaning out of our lives. Of course we have always been used to that from papa for years and years, but when Harry’s good temper and spirits fail, it is almost impossible for mamma and me to struggle on.”

“Poor little clinging air-plant!” said Katherine, somewhat patronisingly, as she tried to stroke the angry flush from Emmie’s cheek with her firm, cool hand. “When do

you mean to strike down roots into soil of your own, that will make you a little more independent of other people's tempers and doings?"

"I don't know," answered Emmie, who was too much in earnest in her present sorrow to care to change the talk into a discussion of Katherine's favourite theories. "I don't think that even working for myself, or having ever such a grand career of my own, would make me indifferent to papa's and Harry's doings. How could it, when it has come to such a pass with us that we are being ruined by our father, and that Harry, who has always stood up for papa through everything till now, is losing faith in him at last? Oh, I wonder how successful people feel—the clever speculators who gain what the foolish ones lose? I wonder what their houses are like, and how they look when they come back to their wives, and their sons and daughters, and tell them that they are gaining every day, and putting the possibility of poverty and anxiety farther and farther away from them? Alma could tell me. She knows by this time how the Kirkmans live, and how they behave to each other."

"But you don't envy them?" said Katherine, a little disturbed at the sort of hungry light which came into Emmie's eyes as she spoke the last words. "You don't wish that your father were a successful deceiver, instead

of the dupe of other people's cunning? He is very wrong, no doubt; but failure in such a course is a shade better than success."

"Yes," said Emmie suddenly, unclasping the hands she had raised over her head, and relaxing all her strung frame into its usual soft, pliable lines. "Yes, you are right there. I don't envy the Kirkmans—no, I don't. I would not have a splendid house and prosperity that an honest person could not share. I don't put *riches* above *people*, if Alma does. I am only wondering how she has liked her Christmas visit, and perhaps thinking it strange that her new year should begin so differently from mine; that she should be enjoying herself with the winners, while I am finding out all the bitterness that comes to those who lose. Well, Alma may choose the Kirkmans and their splendour, but everyone does not feel like her—not everyone."

Katherine could have wished that Emmie had said she preferred principles to riches instead of *people*, and that the soft light which put out the anger in her eyes had not suggested some new direction, towards which the air-plant was putting out its tendrils, rather than any resolute taking foot-hold on soil of its own, such as she recommended. She let the conversation drop here, however, for she saw that Emmie's thoughts had drifted away into a channel where she had no clue to follow her.

Emmie's fancies were the more tempted to stray towards Alma and her late gaieties just now, because, since the beginning of the year, one or two little incidents had conspired to restore the Rivers family to that prominent place of importance in the thoughts of their West relations, which they had rather forfeited by their neglect before Constance's marriage. Lady Rivers had sent her carriage with an urgent message one day when she was suffering from a severe cold, and caused Mrs. West to dress hastily in her best clothes, and leave her own home-business at a very inconvenient moment, to go and sit with her sister through one of her idle mornings. Sir Francis too had himself actually called in Saville Street one Sunday afternoon, happily interrupting the weekly repetition of the Catechism by the younger children, and had made Mrs. West's heart flutter with wild hopes by asking various questions about the ages and prospects of the boys, and by remarking that Aubrey (Casabianca) was a well-grown, intelligent-looking lad for his age, and ought to be enjoying greater educational advantages than the school he at present attended seemed likely to afford. And besides—only Emmie in all the family knew the link which made this circumstance a “besides” to the others—Mr. Anstice had taken to dropping in for an hour in the evening at short intervals, and had contrived to make his

visits welcome to all the members of the household, as an agreeable lightening of the gloom of this dreary season. Mrs. West pleaded the possibility of late visitors as an excuse for bringing Emmie, Harry, and Mildie into the dining-room for the last hour or so before bed-time, and when Mr. Anstice did come in, they were almost a merry family party. Wynyard drew Mildie out about her studies, and won her heart by giving her a better explanation of an algebraic problem than she had got from Katherine Moore, while professing to share Casabianca's awe of her learning all the time. Once or twice the two Moores were invited to take late tea in the dining-room to meet him, and then, when Mr. West was discovered to be fairly asleep behind his newspaper, they all gathered round the fire, and actually achieved a game of capping verses.

“Just as other people do at Christmas time,” triumphantly remarked Casabianca, who had stolen in against orders, and who endured the verses for the sake of monopolising a seat next Christabel Moore, and preventing Harry from handing her tea-cup. The mirth and the interest he showed in all that went on were thoroughly genuine on Wynyard's part, for he had long been so shut out from any experience of family life as to be grateful for such a chance participation in it as even this; but Emmie was not blinded to the hope which lay

at the bottom of his attraction towards their society, and, with a sad little feeling of self-depreciation, she made it a point of justice with herself to give him each time he came, at some well-chosen moment, the word or two of news about Alma for which she felt sure he was longing. "Of course," she thought, "it is to hear of Alma, not to sit an hour in our dull house, that he, who can make himself welcome anywhere, takes the trouble of seeking us, and laying himself out to please us. It would be cheating him to let him go away without what he comes for." She feared that in taking his wishes thus for granted she was perhaps assuming a closer intimacy than the extent of their acquaintance really warranted, but Alma's name slipped almost involuntarily from her lips on the first opportunity that came, and when once such an amount of private understanding had been established between them, it seemed useless to go back from it. "Yes," she had said, on the occasion of Mr. Anstice's first call after Christmas, when he and she chanced to be standing a little apart from the rest, and he had hesitatingly ventured a remark that tended in that direction—"yes, they did go to Golden Mount two days before Christmas, and they stayed till the end of the first week in the new year. I don't know how Alma enjoyed the visit, and I am afraid I shall not have an opportunity of asking her, for Aunt

Rivers took a severe cold in coming home, and is full of anxiety just now about her own health. She sent for mamma, and told her that on account of her illness she should not give the usual Christmas party, to which Harry and I have always been invited hitherto."

"It is rather hard on you, is it not, to lose your share of pleasure because other people have been having too much of it?"

Emmie's face flushed up. Did he think her such a baby, or so ignorant of what was due to her, as to be pleased with the sort of entertainment she met with at Aunt Rivers's house?

"I don't think I shall miss it," she said.

"Well, I am not so philosophical as you are. I used to think those Christmas parties at the Rivers's very pleasant, and I saw you there last year, you know."

"In a corner," said Emmie, smiling; and Wynyard, reading the mortifying recollections that lurked in the smile, answered quickly:

"Yes, we shared the corner together for a good part of the evening, did we not? You took me in when I was feeling myself somewhat in the shade and wanting someone to countenance me, and I assure you I felt grateful."

A speech, by the way, which won more gratitude

and dwelt longer in its hearer's memory than it deserved from the amount of meaning it had for the speaker.

On the next occasion there was more shyness in Emmie's manner when the subject was entered upon, and a look of pain in her eyes which startled Wynyard as showing a deeper understanding of his feelings than he liked to realise, perhaps also a knowledge of something kept back for the sake of sparing him.

"Alma was here to-day," Emmie began, in an interval of a game at "What is my thought like?" which Casabianca had got up. "She came with a message to mamma from Aunt Rivers, and sat in that chair where you are sitting now, talking for nearly an hour to Mildie and me."

"Indeed"—with a visible effort to speak indifferently, and empty his face of expression, "and I hope that your cousin brought you a better account of Lady Rivers."

"Do you care so much for Aunt Rivers? I thought——"

"That I did not like her," interrupted Wynyard, forced to take up his natural manner again through sheer amusement at Emmie's *naïveté*. "Well, let us change that topic then, and turn to a kindred one in which I hope you will allow me to be honestly interested. What

prospect is there of Christmas gatherings at the Rivers's for us all?"

Emmie shook her head.

"I don't believe you want to talk about that either. There was nothing said about it, but it is not likely; they are full of other things."

"The splendours of Golden Mount to wit?"

"Perhaps Alma is not really thinking so much about Golden Mount as might be supposed," said Emmie, answering the look that accompanied the question, rather than his words. "I have often noticed that she talks most of what she cares least about. She said there was a grand show, and that the Kirkmans were better bred people than she expected to find them. Mr. Kirkman himself seems to have made a great deal of Alma, and to have given her a prominent part in the acting and everything, though there were people of much higher rank and consequence of the party."

"It does credit to Mr. Kirkman's discrimination. He is no fool, he knows how to help himself; he is choosing his tools to force his way into society with the same judgment as when he built up his fortune."

"Tools! Alma?"

"It was an irreverent expression. I recall it. Let us hope that Mr. Kirkman has for once met his match,

and that your cousin is not going to let herself be made a tool of."

Emmie glanced at her father nodding uncomfortably in his high-backed chair.

"Some *men* are made tools of, I know," she said sorrowfully. "I did not mean that Alma was too wise, only that I did not see how she could be of any use to Mr. Kirkman, who seems to be courted by the grandest people in London. The charade-acting went on for several nights, and Alma enjoyed the magnificent way in which everything was done. She brought Sidney a very beautiful box of bonbons that had been presented to her in some scene she acted in."

"That was a good-natured thought at all events."

"Sidney put it into the fire directly she had gone—I made him," said Emmie, lowering her voice and turning away her head to hide the crimson that tingled to the very roots of her hair.

Then while Wynyard was thinking in some surprise that this soft-eyed grey-robed little girl, who looked so childish and talked so frankly, had stronger feelings and more decided opinions than many more imposing-looking specimens of her kind, she looked up again and said quickly: "Did that paper you wrote against speculation ever get printed after all?"

“Yes, it did, so long ago that I had almost forgotten it.”

“I should like to read it.”

“Do you interest yourself in social questions so much?”

“In that one I do. I can’t help it. I have to think of it every day, and I wish I had not, for it makes me angry with people I ought not to be angry with, and puts hard thoughts in my head, for which I am more sorry afterwards than anyone knows.”

Quick-rising tears drowned all the anger in her eyes at the last words, and Wynyard answered kindly: “We all have hard thoughts to repent of now and then. With you they will pass away with the cause that excites them, and they will leave no bitterness behind. We shall soon be allowed to forget the Kirkmans altogether, let us hope. Here is Casabianca coming to ask ‘What our thoughts are like.’ Let us try which of us can suggest the farthest-away topic from the Kirkmans. Would it be allowable for me to say, ‘Miss Emmie West,’ and then I should be safe from stumbling upon them again when I am asked for my comparison.”

CHAPTER XI.

HORACE KIRKMAN.

Use virtue as it goeth nowadays,
In word alone, to make thy language sweet ;
And of thy deed yet do not as thou says ;
Else be thou sure, thou shalt be far unmeet
To get thy bread.

At the time of the last recorded conversation Alma herself would often have been glad of leave to forget the Kirkmans, for the consequences of the accepted Christmas visit were spreading into more intricate meshes than she had at all bargained for. One more name on their already long visiting list, one more great house whose crowded entertainments they might swell when they pleased, it had not seemed any great matter at first, but——was it a result of something in the Kirkman character or fortune which doomed them always to swallow up rival interests and swell into colossal bigness wherever they appeared—it really did seem to Alma now as if this new acquaintance was destined to absorb all their other social ties, and stand out the chief fact in their outside world.

They had been at home some three weeks, but the Kirkman flavour which, as a first result of accepted hospitality, had pervaded their Christmas parties, and overflowed even into the innermost recesses of home life, had not in any degree abated yet. Perhaps some of their old chosen friends were holding aloof in consequence of this new obtrusive element; Alma was not sure, but she felt that somehow or other she was being swept along as in a triumphal procession, or rather involved in the rush of a victorious army on its way to seize the seat of power, and when she perceived that her talents were reckoned on and skilfully used as auxiliary forces in the struggle, she felt put upon her mettle, and could not but take pleasure in proving that she was more than equal to the expectations she had raised. She saw that she had got among people who appreciated her brilliant social talents as they would never be appreciated in the respectable narrow clique to which the Forrests belonged, and into which her mother by much patient struggle had barely got a precarious foothold in all these years. It was a new, more dazzling, more exciting world she was invited to enter, and there were times when its rush and glare and the field for ambition it seemed to offer, captivated Alma's imagination, while at other moments she loathed it all. These last were generally the moments when she

felt, as she was now often made to feel, that intimacy or non-intimacy with the Kirkmans was no longer, as at first, a question that her will would have much weight in determining. She had drawn her father into accepting their advances at first, and he had given way with his usual indifference to everything that lay outside his own province, but now he, hardly less than her mother, had fallen under the new influence. He took to admiring Mr. Kirkman as a contrast to Sir John Forrest, and relieved the *pique* which his son-in-law's supercilious dulness constantly provoked, by taking every occasion to launch out in praise of his new friend's shrewd humour, and the rough common sense that made his conversation actually worth listening to.

Luckily for Constance, these tirades were generally uttered in the absence of the person at whom they were aimed, and Alma enjoyed one all to herself through a *tête-à-tête* dinner with her father on the evening of the day when she had called in Saville Street, her mother being confined to bed with a rather serious relapse, brought on by her having insisted on going out to attend a grand concert at the Kirkmans', when her doctor had positively forbidden her to leave her room. Sir Francis confined himself to generalities as long as the servants were present, but when the dessert was put upon the

table and he was alone with his daughter, the conversation took a more confidential turn. "Yes," he began meditatively, as he proceeded to peel a gigantic, highly-flavoured pear which had come in a basket of splendid fruit sent from the Golden Mount winter-gardens; "yes, that last talk I had with Kirkman two days ago has almost decided me. You may not like the thought of it, Alma, and I am not sure that it will please the lad himself, but I believe it is the best I can do for him. I am thinking of removing your brother Gerald from college—your mother will tell you what reason I have to be discontented with the bills sent to me on his account this term, though Heaven knows his allowance is ampler than I can well afford to make it—and putting him to some sort of business under Mr. Kirkman's protection. He has brains enough for that, I suppose, though he has not been able to make anything out of his residence at Oxford so far, but an occasion for spending my money. If I had behaved in my youth as your brothers seem to think themselves justified in behaving now, I wonder where I should have been at this moment—certainly not supplying my family with the means of living in luxurious idleness."

"I am afraid Gerald is idle, papa; but do you think he is fitted for business? Would he get on with Mr. Kirkman if he took him into partnership?"

“Took *him*! Mr. Kirkman! Your head must be turned indeed, Alma, to entertain such a notion. Millionaires like Mr. Kirkman don’t take idle lads like Gerald into partnership so readily. No, I am not thinking of any such close connection; I am not even sure it would be desirable for Gerald, but Mr. Kirkman’s affairs have ramifications in many directions, and he has suggested several possible steps that might be taken for establishing Gerald where his influence would tell immensely in opening the way for him. He is very downright and plain-spoken, a little premature perhaps in stating his wishes and explaining his motives for offering help, but as for partnership,—Gerald, at all events, is not the member of our family he would choose to confer that distinction upon, if he had it in his power. He is too good a judge of what is worth having for that.

Alma would not see the look of amused intelligence her father directed towards her as he finished his sentence, though she felt it, and to turn back the conversation from the dangerous direction it was taking, said quickly:

“I always thought you hoped to get some Government appointment for Gerald if he failed at Oxford. Everyone says you have so much interest!”

“And that I have strained it to the last, tug it will

bear. Don't you remember the remarks in the papers when Frank was sent out to India, remarks, by the way, which he seems bent on justifying just now. No, no, Alma; I have stretched my conscience too far already on Frank's and Melville's behalf. A public man who has the misfortune to have half-a-dozen fools for his sons, should know when to stop in pushing them, unless he means to sink himself and all his belongings together. There have been instances enough of fair reputations ruined in that way; I don't want to swell the number."

Alma made no answer. Her father had got upon the one topic—his sons' incapacities—of which he ever spoke with bitterness, and she knew that if he were not contradicted, his usual cheerful disposition to make the best of things would soon reassert itself. There was a little pause, and then with a sigh which seemed to dismiss a mountain-load of disappointment he went on:

"Well, I suppose there is a great deal of give and take in the way in which this world's affairs are managed. One must not expect to have everything to one's mind. If I had been a weak-minded unlucky old potterer like poor West, for example, I daresay I should have had energetic clever children to work for me, and take a great deal more account of me than if I had been the making of them. As it is, I suppose I must just broaden

out my shoulders to carry the whole kit of you on to the end !”

“Papa,” said Alma, whom this comparison with the Wests touched to the quick, “will you tell me exactly what you mean to-day ? Are you thinking that *I* could do anything ?”

She rose as she spoke, walked to the end of the table where he was seated, and stood behind his chair, putting her arms round his neck. He turned back his head to look up at her, the cloud quite gone from his face, and a playful affectionate smile hovering round his lips and in his eyes.

“Am I getting *so very* feeble,” he asked, “that you suggest your white shoulders as a substitute for mine ? No, no, my child. Here, sit down quite close to me that we may talk out our case comfortably together. If I know myself, I have nothing in my mind about you, beyond a wish that you should do what is best for yourself, and what you *like* best, in any decision you may be called upon to make soon. Of course with a needy clique like ourselves, if one gets very considerably up in the world, it gives a hand to all the rest ; but I was not making you the subject of any vicarious ambitions, I assure you. Don’t imagine that I am making an appeal to you for help ; my arm feels strong enough yet to pull

all my belongings through, even if they continue to be such a dead weight behind me as Frank and Melville and Gerald have contrived to prove themselves this last year."

"But it is very hard on you. I wish—Oh, how I wish——"

"That heads could be changed," said Sir Francis, drawing his hand knife-wise across Alma's slender throat. "If we could just take off this head with all there is in it, and put it on Frank's shoulders, there might be a chance of a judge's wig for it some day, while his straight features and crisp black curls and company-smirk would do very well for the head ornament of a petticoat balloon, would not they?"

"Do you mean," said Alma, drawing back her head a little hastily, "that you quite despair of my being of any use—any satisfaction to you as I am; won't you condescend to want anything from me?"

"Only that you should be happy, and not make any mistake in your start in life. I don't deny it is a mortification to me that none of your brothers seem in the least likely to make a figure in the world, or that I should not be glad to see the one child who can sympathise with me, in a position where the little bit of wit she has perhaps inherited from me could be shown to advantage.

I thought Agatha had brains once, and that she would be a pleasure to me, but she chose to bury herself in a convent, and I gave my consent rather than thwart her, and I will be equally indulgent to you all. If you choose to stick yourself in a corner, or even to bring another impracticable upon me in the shape of a pseudo-social reformer we wot of, I won't grumble, but—well, I will be candid with you, child, to-night, as you ask it—the other thing would make me happier.”

It was early days to speak about that “other thing,” for though Alma and everybody about her had seen it hovering nearer and nearer for some weeks, no shape of words had, as yet, been given to it, so far as Alma's knowledge went. Her father must then know more than she did; Mr. Kirkman must have been speaking to him about his son's feelings—no, intentions—the idea of Mr. Kirkman speaking about *feelings* was too absurd. The discovery did not make Alma blush—the subject had for her no possibility in it of calling up a blush, but her heart stirred with a strong emotion, which might be fear or elation, but which was due chiefly to the thought of the consequence she might be to her father. She said nothing more, but drew a dish towards her and began silently to pick out the choicest specimens of Golden Mount fruit to take upstairs to her mother, Brobding-

nagian grapes of the rarest flavour, and yellow bananas with no flavour at all, but which her mother liked to eat because they had ripened in hot-houses that were the wonder of the country round for the skill and expense it cost to keep them up to the pitch of perfection Mr. Kirkman required in all his belongings.

“Papa,” she said, as her fingers laid the last bunch on the pyramid she had been building, “did you ever read ‘Patronage’?”

“A novel of Miss Edgeworth’s? Why, yes, I think I did, to your mother on our wedding journey. There is a bad lawyer in it, is there not, who is always trying to hook his children on to someone else. Were you pointing a moral at me, my dear? I don’t feel very guilty!”

Before Alma had time to disclaim, a servant entered and gave a visiting-card to Sir Francis Rivers.

“Horace Kirkman to inquire after Lady Rivers. You can show him in here to me, Preston.” Then as the servant left the room and Alma rose to carry off her fruit, Sir Francis added:

“That young man is a frequent visitor, certainly, but I can put up with him, he has something to say for himself. Old Kirkman is a luckier fellow than I am; he has only one son, and he has contrived somehow to give him a good deal of the polish that a rise in the world makes

desirable, with hardly any diminution of the pluck and energy that built up his fortune. There must be some satisfaction in sending an improved edition of oneself into the world to carry on one's work."

"Papa," said Alma, smiling, "you forget that you are a Lord Justice, and must not condescend to turn advocate again. When you first saw Mr. Horace Kirkman, I remember you said he was nothing but a frank, overgrown Eton schoolboy."

"Yes, but one of the right sort, with what the Americans call grit in him, and plenty of force and determination, so as to be all the better for growing up slowly. I hate your *blasé* old men of twenty-two, and am not overfond of world-philosophers of twenty-six either. But what am I about? You must not misunderstand me, child, I make no pretension to overrule your judgment. You are going up to sit with your mother now, I suppose? Do as you like, *just* as you like, about coming down to the drawing-room again this evening."

"I shall certainly come back, papa, if mamma can spare me, and relieve you by the time you have had Alpine climbing and athletics enough to send you to sleep," said Alma, who was more deeply touched by the look of tender consideration, almost of deference, that accompanied her father's last words than she could have

been by any amount of persuasion. She paused and stooped to kiss his forehead before she left him, though she felt that the action and the promise she had just given were first steps in yielding a great deal more than she had as yet quite made up her mind to yield. The consequence of this delay was that she came upon the hastily-entering visitor in the doorway with her dish of fruit in one hand. "An improved edition of the elder Kirkman——, yes, certainly her father was right there," Alma thought, as she raised her eyes to a sunburnt bluff face, that was just then one smile of delight at seeing her, and yielding her disengaged hand to a shake that would have been boisterous if the giver of it had not felt a sudden check—a touch of wonder and tenderness, awakened by the contrast between his rough, red palm, and the "white wonder of a hand" that lay in it.

"You are going away already, Miss Rivers?" he exclaimed in a tone of vexation. "Can't I carry those things anywhere for you? No—to Lady Rivers, you say, and I should disturb her; too clumsy, in fact—but what am I good for, but to fetch and carry for you? You will come back, though, won't you? My people are gone to the opera to hear Patti, and I gave up going with them to come here, hoping you would sing that song to me we

talked about last night. I have got it here in my pocket, just let me show it to you."

"You had better have gone to hear Patti," Alma said, mentally registering a vow never to mention anything she could be supposed to desire to a Kirkman again, for fear of having it thrust upon her. "However, I will come down to the drawing-room by-and-by, if mamma can spare me; she is not very well to-night."

Lady Rivers was dozing when Alma got upstairs, and she had time for a good deal of thought as she sat by the bedroom fire, waiting till her mother was ready to talk to her. She covered her face with her hands to shut out even the subdued light of the fire, while she mentally went through her late conversation with her father word by word, but no idle tears streamed through her fingers on this occasion; she was too much in earnest in her thinking now to take the tear-provoking, sentimental view of the question she had to determine. She wished the crisis had not come so soon, she wished people would let her alone, just till some sore places in her mind—or heart, was it—were more nearly healed; she wished vaguely that all the good of a woman's life did not depend on decisions that were thrust upon her, not brought by her own will, or at her own time; she wished that it were possible to wipe out whole pages of

memory and leave them clean and blank for fresh writing. Looks, tones of voice, the remembrance of long talks on summer evenings, or in nooks by Christmas fires, when thought, too quick for words, leaped out to meet thought—if these were to fit in with nothing that matched them in after life, what a constant ache their memory would be! How hard to bear the gnawing hunger to look at them again which must never be satisfied, never! If such recollections could be washed away, burned away, by any alchemy, if memory were a live thing, and could be made to drink molten gold like Crassus, and be suffocated by the draught—then—then her father's wishes might have some reason in them, and a life satisfactory enough might be now opening out before her.

From this point her thoughts became less collected, and merged into a succession of pictures of herself in contrasted situations, beneath each of which she mentally wrote the words "bearable" or "unbearable." And all the time it never occurred to her that it was mainly of herself she was thinking, of her own importance to her father, of the way in which her own family and friends would esteem her, of the possibility of forgetting and ceasing to suffer, of the sufficiency of the lot she might choose to her own requirements, as bringing her the manner of life most congenial to her tastes. She fancied

she was preparing for an heroic sacrifice, but the subtle poison of self-regard lay under all her thoughts and purposes, putting the true womanly instincts, the enlightening intuitions of real self-forgetting love, far away from her.

Lady Rivers woke up before anything like a resolution had grown out of these cogitations, and Alma had to apply herself to the task of soothing away the fretfulness that usually attended her mother's awakening. Lady Rivers did not make such a tractable invalid as her sister, Mrs. West, who had gone through a long apprenticeship to suffering of one kind or another, and who could not afford to make much of small ailments.

Lady Rivers's invalid mood vacillated between a desire to claim all the pity and consideration from husband, children, and friends which the rare occurrence of her illness called for, and the revulsion she felt when their concern grew real enough to rouse thoughts of her own danger, and drive her to frantic efforts to prove to herself that her health was as good as it had been years ago. Having been reassured about her condition by her doctor just before she slept, she awoke in the fretful, complaining state of temper.

"No, I have not had a comfortable rest," she said, when Alma came to the bedside to offer the fruit she had brought upstairs. "I must have closed my eyes just as

you came in, for the dinner-hour seemed very long, and I could hear your voices whenever the dining-room door opened. Your father must have been talking all the time very amusingly, I daresay, as he never does when I'm downstairs—I've observed it hundreds of times, you need not contradict me, Alma—you and he will get on very well together, and settle the affairs of the family all your own way when I am quite laid aside. No one will miss me, I daresay, but my poor Gerald, whom your father is so hard upon. He has been complaining of Gerald to you, perhaps."

"Hardly that," said Alma, "and indeed, mamma, you should not allow yourself to grow low-spirited. You will be as well as ever, and among us again in a few weeks, if you will only be prudent. Dr. Urquhart told you so this afternoon, now did not he?"

"Yes, but after all, Dr. Urquhart is only a young man, whom I was induced to call in because your Aunt West tells me such astonishing things of his skill. I hope he is not making a mistake about me. There is consumption in my family, and I was quite shocked to see how thin your poor Aunt West looked when she called here the other day."

"But you are not thin, mamma, happily."

"I am sure it's a wonder I'm not, when you think of

all there is to harass me. Your father's displeasure against Gerald, and your intractable temper, Alma, that will make you, I know, go against my wishes whenever a chance arises of something I should particularly like, happening to you. I say nothing of the miserable separation from Agatha, nor of my disappointment at seeing so little of Constance, that really she might almost as well have married young Lawrence, and gone out to India, for any comfort she is likely to be to me now. Your Aunt West is luckier than I am in keeping her children about her, and getting them to behave affectionately and dutifully at home. I often think how nice it must be for her to have a cheerful-tempered daughter like Emmie, whom she feels justified in keeping always at home to wait on her, because there are no other prospects open to her but just to make herself useful in her own family."

"If you could reconcile yourself to such prospects for me, mamma, I should only be too glad," Alma said, not quite truthfully, as her conscience told her the minute she had spoken. "At all events, let me stay to-night and read to you; there is nothing I should like better," she added, feeling perfectly sincere now. It really did come like a reprieve to her, to escape a return to the guest in the drawing-room, and that nice adjustment of manner

between repression and encouragement which her present vacillating turn of mind rendered necessary.

The book Alma took up was a volume of religious meditations adapted to a time of sickness, left by Mrs. West the week before, and every sentence she read sounded like a sarcasm to Alma as addressed to the invalid on whose behalf she was giving expression to counsels of submission and detachment from earthly cares. Possibly Lady Rivers only heard the musical cadences of Alma's voice flowing evenly on, without taking in much of the meaning of what she read, for she was apparently listening all through the lecture, for indications of movement in other parts of the house. Presently she lifted up her head quickly.

"The dining-room door opened just now, and I thought I heard two sets of footsteps going up to the drawing-room. Is not your father alone to-night?"

"Mr. Horace Kirkman came in just as I was leaving the dining-room with a message of inquiry for you from Mrs. Kirkman. I forgot to tell you."

"Forgot,—really, Alma, I have no patience with you; and you sit here as if you did not know you were wanted in the drawing-room. Of course you must go at once."

"Not if you would like me to stay, mamma. Let me at least finish this chapter about illness being a call to

renounce worldly-mindedness, which Aunt West, you see, has scored with double lines all down the page."

"My dear, what nonsense! What does all that signify when Horace Kirkman is waiting downstairs to see you? You can send Ward to me, or if she is still at supper, I don't mind being left alone, not in the least, when you are so well occupied. I would not keep you from Horace Kirkman on any account. Kiss me before you go, however, Alma. You may not think it, but I have done the best for you all that I knew how, ever since you were born, and I never mind being neglected or anything when it's a question of advancement for any of you."

Alma gave the kiss required, shut up the book of devotional essays whose teaching seemed so very wide of the mark just now, and went downstairs.

"It was true," she said to herself on the way, quite true. It was *her* advancement that both her parents desired, only that. They wanted her to have what they cared most for, and had prized most themselves. Why should she feel indignation against them when she perceived the manœuvres that thrust advancement nearer and nearer to her? Did she not, at the bottom of her heart, or if *heart* was the wrong word, of her *mind*, desire it for herself? Was it not her chief good too? She was still in a contradictory, uncertain mood when she reached the drawing-

room, and she resisted all Mr. Kirkman's efforts to induce her to try the music he had brought for her. She would hold on to the privilege of playing music of her own choosing and purchasing for some little time longer, at all events, she thought; and besides, a *tête-à-tête* at the piano would have reminded her too closely of another evening's *tête-à-tête*, whose incidents and emotions she had no desire to dwell upon just then.

To break the spell she placed herself as far from the piano as possible, under the full light of a chandelier, and armed herself with a large embroidery-frame, which she hoped would convey a hint of unapproachableness that a person of the smallest sensitiveness would not fail to interpret. But Mr. Horace Kirkman was not sensitive in the least degree. If she would have consented to sing to him in a far-away corner of the room he would have liked it, but since that did not please her, he was almost as well content to sit astride a drawing-room chair planted as immediately in front of her as the embroidery-frame permitted, and crossing his arms on the back and propping his chin thereon, to look at her and talk at his ease without fear of interruption. It was true that he had plenty to say for himself, and not altogether foolish things either. Alma looked up from her work at the end of any sentence that chanced to call for an answer,

(monologue about his own affairs was Mr. Horace Kirkman's habit rather than conversation), and met sensible eyes full of admiration and liking fixed unfalteringly on her. There was no shy reverent veiling of feeling in them, for she was not a mystery or an ideal to him, and carried no halo of unapproachable purity and glory about her head; she was just a beautiful, stylish woman, whom he liked heartily, and thought every way fitted to share the successful jolly life he meant his to be, and he did not much care how soon or how late she understood him, being pretty confident of getting what he wanted in the end. The big, strong, self-assertive face, full of blunt common sense and directness of purpose, would, no doubt, Alma allowed, have been attractive to some women, for to some it might even have realised their highest ideal of a desirable lord and master to whom a submissive life might be dedicated. To some women, perhaps, but not to her: she might take him for her own, she would have to bow down if she did take him, she would have to grow to his likeness in the end contentedly enough, perhaps, but such taking would always be, to her conscience, a distinct choosing the world—the world instead of something else, some vague ideal that might have been better, though her eyes were not purged enough to see it clearly, and become out-and-out enamoured of its beauty. Here Alma had to

look up and smile at the point of an anecdote Mr. Kirkman had just finished, relating to some adventure of his own in foreign travel; and she managed the necessary smile, not very meaningly, perhaps, but with quite expression enough to satisfy her present companion, and then, looking down, she resumed her reflections, which gradually crystallised into something as like a purpose as reflections of this kind usually produce.

She resolved that she would not allow herself to be hurried into an irrevocable promise to Horace Kirkman, but at the same time she did not determine to set herself seriously against the current of events that were, she knew, bearing her steadily on to that point in the end. She was not strong enough for such a course, not sure enough of her own wishes, or, she said to herself, of the real wishes of that other person whose want of determination to win her as she wished to be won, was perhaps the real grievance that lay at the bottom of her vacillation, and of the dull fire of pain and indignation she was trying to trample out into dead ashes in her heart. What justice there might be in giving this dead heart in exchange for the honest liking she thought of appropriating she did not ask herself; and she dismissed the question with a reflection that a Kirkman might surely be trusted to look after his own interest and get of everything he wanted as much, or more than he deserved.

CHAPTER XII.

ROUND THE FIRE.

Let others seek for empty joys,
At ball or concert, rout or play;
Whilst, far from fashion's idle noise,
Her gilded domes and trappings gay,
I while the wintry eve away;
'Twixt book and lute the hours divide,
And marvel how I ere could stray
From thee—my own fireside.

LADY RIVERS'S covetous longing after Emmie West as a convenient sick nurse who might, without scruple, be kept constantly in attendance was not a mere passing fancy. It recurred again and took the persistent shape of an invalid's craving, when a succession of imprudences had brought about a state of health that made Dr. Urquhart speak warningly, and at last obliged Sir Francis to interpose his authority against further trifling.

Mrs. West came often to Eccleston Square, and while Alma was driving or visiting with the Kirkmans, spent long mornings and afternoons shut up in her sister's close dressing-room, and then went out into the cold January air to make her way back to distant Saville

Street, and reached home exhausted and shivering, to the loud-spoken indignation of Emmie and Harry, but to the silent satisfaction of Mr. West, who, from the depth of his present humiliation, saw a possibility of advantage in this renewal of the intimacies of old times.

Mrs. West was companion enough for her sister as long as actual suffering lasted; her soft voice and sad eyes and resigned phrases were felt by Lady Rivers to be the best safeguards to have about her so long as she was obliged to admit the shadow of a distant dread into her thoughts; but when she began to think she might dismiss that fear to another season, Mrs. West's grey presence was discovered to be a little oppressive.

"Poor Emmeline," Lady Rivers would say to her husband, when he went to her sitting-room a few minutes before dinner to congratulate her on having had her sister's company through the afternoon; "Poor Emmeline is not much of a companion for me now; she never had any spirit, and she has let herself sink dreadfully under her misfortunes: she cannot see that there are a great many alleviating circumstances in her case, though I tell her she really ought to see it. We all have our anxieties, and if I were to look only at mine I should be melancholy enough. The trial of poverty

is nothing to the trial of parting with one's children. Indeed, I tell Emmeline that if I could keep a dutiful daughter like her Emmie always with me, I don't think I should care very much for anything else. She confesses that she finds it an immense comfort, and she has promised that I shall have Emmie to stay here for a week or two while I am so closely shut up, and while Alma's time is too much engaged with visitors for her to be often with me."

"I don't see why Alma should not give up her time to nurse you as well as Emmie West."

"My dear, what are you thinking of? I would not be so selfish for the world. I should be miserable if Alma were shut in here with me in this close room, losing her complexion and everything, just at this time when so much is going on of immense importance to her. I am not selfish."

"Emmie West's complexion is not of any importance then? There is nothing selfish in shutting her up?"

"My dear, we can so easily, in so many little ways, make it up to the Wests. Why, as we are not likely to give dinner-parties till I am about again, I have ordered one of our weekly hampers of poultry and game from Longhurst to be sent to Saville Street, instead of here. Mr. West is a man who values a second course to

his dinner, and to be able to give it him is an immense comfort to poor Emmeline I find."

"It balances the loss of her daughter, who is, you say, an immense comfort too, eh? But, my dear, why have you not thought of doing this before, if they really cannot indulge themselves in game, unless it is sent to them? I fancy, 'if I were to look back, I could find in some corner of my mind recollections of dinners in Saville Street, when the second course was something of a treat to us too. I have no time for such matters, but how is it that you did not think of the game sooner?'"

"When we were giving two dinner-parties a week ourselves, it was impossible to spare it; and besides, I always think it is a pity to let such things grow into a habit. They would have depended on its coming every week, and it would have been no particular pleasure or gratification just now."

"When it comes as payment for shutting up poor little Emmie; you are a financier lost, my dear. However, if her complexion is to be sacrificed—it is a very pretty one, by-the-way, and beats Alma's altogether—I think I should like the payment to be of a more durable kind than a few hampers of poultry and game. Our success with our own sons does not warrant interference with other

people's, or we might offer to do something for one of the West lads."

"Yes, something suitable for them, and that would not be burdensome to you hereafter, such as getting a presentation to Christ's Hospital for Aubrey. There is nothing Emmeline would like so well as that."

"You think so,—well, when I can get a moment I will make another pilgrimage to Saville Street and speak to West himself about the boy. If he were not such a sulky brute, and did not take such pains to prove that he can be as insolent to me now he is a poor man, as he used to be when he was rich, I should go there a great deal oftener, and need not feel such a sneak as I do now when I see any of them."

"It's very absurd of you, for I am sure we have always been quite as kind and friendly since their misfortunes as they could possibly expect. And you must not suppose I am not intending to do more for Emmie, if she pleases me, than you know of at present. I have thought of a plan very much to her advantage, which I have no doubt I shall be able to manage, though I don't speak of it till I see a little more clearly how things are tending with Alma."

"Don't let it be a matrimonial speculation, however, my dear. You have a great genius for management,

and I assure you I feel a sort of awe of your cleverness, when I occasionally get a glimpse into the intricacies of your plans; but I doubt whether the result, as shown in your daughters' marriages, will be so much better than my placing of my sons, as to make it worth our while to take the guidance of another set of lives into our hands. Let Emmie try her own luck in getting a husband, without your meddling in it."

"Of course I shall not think of anything of the kind for Emmie West at present; I should feel it quite treacherous towards Emmeline, who wants her to be useful at home, and to make herself pleasant to friends who can help her brothers on in the world. It will be time to think of settling Emmie in five or six years, and then, if anything suitable turns up, I'm sure I shall be ready to make her a handsome wedding present—perhaps I shall give her that set of garnets and pearls I wore when I was presented, which Alma does not like. If she makes at all a decent match, and she is rather pretty, I think I will give them to her; but you may rest assured I have no husband in my head for her as yet. My plan is a very kind one, but the least likely in the world to lead to matrimony."

Ignorant of prospective plans for her benefit, Emmie was just at this moment seated on the hearthrug in Air

Throne, whither she had flown on her mother's return from Eccleston Square, to carry to her two friends the astounding news that she had been invited to spend a fortnight with Aunt Rivers, and that her mother wished her to go, but left it to herself to decide.

The tremendous words were spoken, and Emmie clasped her hands round her knees, and looked breathlessly at Katherine Moore's face, waiting for some word to drop from the lips of her oracle that would give the determining weight to one of two opposing inclinations which were struggling for the uppermost place in her mind. She had been nursing an indignation fit against the Riverses in general and Alma in particular, for a whole month, and she was angry with herself for feeling anything but disgust and vexation at the notion of having to spend a fortnight in their company. Yet a certain pleasant surprise at such a recognition of her individuality as was involved in a special invitation from Aunt Rivers, would mollify her prejudices somewhat, and beyond even this lay a flood of eager imaginings about the great unknown world she believed she was now called on to take part in. As Katherine did not speak at once, she put in another subtly-guiding remark to provide against a rash verdict.

“The boys are dreadfully disgusted, of course; but

I can't quite make out what Harry really feels. He said at first that he had rather we all went to the work-house at once than turned bit by bit into convenient hangers-on to the Riverses. Yet just as I was leaving the room to consult you, he said he did not see what there was to consult about, for if my going spared mamma, of course I must go, and think nothing of it. But we have our feelings—our principles of independence, I mean—eh, Katherine—even we girls, have we not ? ”

“ It seems to me quite a simple matter not involving any principle,” answered Katherine, calmly. “ If your mother wishes you to go, and it will spare her fatigue, why do you hesitate ? ”

“ Stay,” said Emmie, who did not quite like to have her important question treated so slightly, “ you must remember that it is years and years since we have any of us been asked to spend even a night in Eccleston Square. Such a thing has not happened since the—the—great break-up. It is like a new beginning, and we must think what it might lead to. I could not stay at their house without getting to know their friends ; perhaps the Kirkmans. If Mr. Kirkman himself—the Mr. Kirkman—were even to speak to me, or offer to shake hands, how ought I to behave to him ? Can I help

remembering how often Harry and I have said that we hate him ? ”

“ I thought you had a great talent for putting yourself into corners in Aunt Rivers’s house ? ”

“ For one evening—but a whole week of corners ! It would be very hard. I don’t think I should like that.”

“ Yet your spirit is rising to meet the hardship. I see it in your eyes,” said Katherine, smiling. “ You will go and come back with a budget of experiences. I shall not be surprised to hear that you have talked politics with Mr. Kirkman in your corner, and persuaded him to lend his drawing-room to David Macvie for a temperance lecture.”

“ You are laughing at me, Katherine, and I am very much in earnest,” cried Emmie, covering her eyes with her hands. “ I wish I knew, I wish I knew——”

“ What ? ” asked Katherine. “ Whose thoughts on this important matter are you trying to read in the dark ? ”

Christabel believed that she could have finished Emmie’s sentence, and was mischievously disposed to do so, till she found that the words were likely to come stammeringly from her lips too, just because a certain

name would have to be spoken which she felt it difficult to bring out quite naturally before Katherine. While she hesitated, and as it seemed in answer to her thought, Casabianca thrust his head into Air Throne, and whispered as through a speaking-trumpet:

“I say, look out! Mr. Anstice has called to inquire after Miss Moore, and Mildie is coolly bringing him up to ‘Air Throne.’ She’s got her abominable chemicals spread out on the dining-room table, and she is ashamed, as she ought to be, of a visitor seeing ’em. Shall I stop them coming up?”

It was too late, however; steps and voices were heard approaching through the long dark passage, and Mildred, talking loud to disguise her consciousness of dingy fingers and two large holes burned in the front breadth of her dress, threw the door wide open and announced the visitor.

“He did not want to come upstairs,” she explained in an aside nearly as loud as Casabianca’s whisper, while Mr. Anstice was shaking hands with Katherine. “He wanted to go away when he heard papa and mamma were both out, but I thought you would all be so dreadfully disappointed not to see him; and I could not take him into the dining-room, because the bladder of laughing-gas has just burst, and the Gentle Lamb has got it into

his head, and is jumping madly about all over the chairs and tables."

Mr. Anstice here turned round to challenge Mildie's assertion that he had not wanted to come upstairs, and the lively argument that followed between them gave Katherine occasion to inquire whether Mildie were not bringing some of the laughing-gas upstairs in her pocket, and chased from Christabel's face the shade of disappointment that had fallen on it when her eye first darted past Mildred to the figure emerging from the darkness behind. She had looked higher for the entering face at first, almost up to the top of the low doorway—but, "No"—she said to herself, she had not really expected anyone else to come in. That strange time when *he* used to enter quietly at this hour of the evening had fallen comfortably into a place among her dream-thoughts, and she did not want it to be disturbed again.

Emmie's cheeks too had leave to cool before anyone looked at them ; then Casabianca pulled forward a long narrow box of Katherine's popularly supposed, among the young Wests, to have a skeleton locked up inside it, to supplement the chairs, and they made a circle round the fire and began to talk. Mildred alone possessed herself of Emmie's late station on the hearthrug, in order that, crouched into a mere heap there, she might the

better hide the offending hands and dress from public view, while she watched her opportunity for insinuating questions on jurisprudence, a subject she was bent on making Mr. Anstice discuss with her. The conversation took a disappointingly frivolous turn for Mildie's purposes. Mr. Anstice seemed very well content with his seat on the skeleton's box, little suspecting, Casabianca thought with grim delight, what there was beneath him ; and he broke the moment's silence that followed the bustle of settling themselves with another declaration of gratitude to Mildred for bringing him upstairs—

“To the pleasantest room in the house,” he said, glancing backward from the circle of red glow round the fireplace to shadowy distances where the window, still uncurtained, cast a glimmer of white light on some papers piled on a table beneath it, and showed, large and fantastic, in a far corner, Christabel's easel, draped in a red cloak she had lately thrown off, and her embroidery-frame, with her hat stuck on one pole. Then looking up at the wreaths of ivy still hanging above the high chimney-piece, where Christabel had put them on Christmas night, he added: “Or any house, I think ; though what makes it so pleasant, and so unlike any other room I have ever been in, it would be difficult to say in a minute.”

“I can,” said Katherine; “it is pleasant only because it is lived in and worked in more constantly than other rooms.”

“No, that won’t do,” objected Wynyard, laughing; “I know you are working women above everything else, but you really must forgive me if I can’t let you arrogate all the work in the world to yourselves. I work a little now and then, and so do a few other men, but our rooms don’t look like yours. My literary litter is hateful enough to look at I know. Now why do those brown leaves up there, for example, look as if some one had brought them from the depth of a forest an hour ago, instead of smoke-dried and miserable as in London they undoubtedly ought to look. There must be witchcraft in it.”

“Of the broom then,” said Christabel, “which we ride for an hour or so every morning, at a time when all the men in London, except policemen and sweeps, are in bed and asleep. If you could see us you would know what a fight with London dust means.”

“It braces us for our other fights,” put in Katherine, “but our work is not all combat. Christabel forgets to mention her duster, or I think it has been a cambric handkerchief lately, and I believe it has something to

say to each leaf and tendril of that ivy-wreath every morning."

Wynyard gave a quick look at Christabel's face, and withdrew his eyes directly when he saw, what he had never seen before, a faint rose colour fluttering up and giving a look as of a summer morning's dawn to a face that generally made one think of moonlight. To cover his curiosity he hastened to speak again—

"Well, I give up the palm of industry to you then. I see you mean to do and be everything at once, and that there is no competing with you in that line; but I won't be made to believe that it is your work I am admiring, when I know I want nothing but to be let into the secret of your play. The real kindness to a poor inferior fellow-worker who gets heartily to hate his own belongings would be, if, having let him inside your sanctuary, you would just forget he is there and go on talking exactly as you did before his intrusion. I know you were discussing something very interesting, for I heard your voices as I came upstairs, and envied you. Can't you go on? To get right into the middle of a conversation and have it go on as if I were not there, has always been a desire of mine since I first began to walk about London streets on winter evenings, and get stray glances into other people's houses before they were closed up."

“Yes,” said Emmie, “I know what you mean; the house over the way always somehow or other looks so much brighter than one’s own.”

“Except to the unfortunate people who have neither a home of their own, nor one over the way to look into. I have two prospects from my chambers: one is into an immense workroom, brilliantly lighted with gas of an evening, where night and day the printing of a newspaper is going on. I don’t despise it for an evening view. The passing backwards and forwards of the dark figures across the windows, that look like furnace-mouths, and the monotonous throb of the steam-engine, which I can feel where I sit, are not bad accompaniments to my thoughts sometimes as I work. My bedroom-window looks across a still narrower street into a long low room, a laundry, I imagine, where three or four women and as many girls stand and wash from morning till night. They come to their work in the early morning just as the night devils are leaving theirs, but I am sorry to say there is nothing angelic in their looks or manners to carry out the contrast. On summer afternoons, when all the windows are open, I have sometimes heard them laughing and talking together; but even that was not exactly exhilarating, and did not inspire me with a wish to explore their interior further.”

“And you really don’t know anything more about these people?” asked Katherine.

“Angels or devils—does one generally know anything about people divided from one by a brick or so in London?”

“I should have thought you would, since you observe them so closely, and say, as you did just now, that the sights and sounds make an accompaniment to your thoughts when you are writing.”

“A kind of irritant that keeps the nervous energy up, that was all I meant. However, I won’t deny that I have an acquaintance or two among the devils; but that is all in the way of work, and I was petitioning for play. We don’t get any nearer the discussion I interrupted when I came in, which I am in hopes Miss West is going to start again for my benefit this moment.”

“Yes, I will tell you what we were talking about,” said Emmie, leaning forward from a low seat in the shelter of Katherine’s chair, where she had partly hidden herself, and speaking hurriedly in one of those rash impulses to openness that sometimes seize upon timid persons, “I will tell you, because it concerned people you know very well, and you will understand. Aunt Rivers has asked me to go to Eccleston Square and help Alma to amuse her while she

is ill, and we were discussing whether I should accept the invitation or not."

"Discussing the claims of rival duties which press upon this helpful little person," put in Katherine, anxious to stave off the appearance of consulting an acquaintance on a family matter.

"You see, it was not at all interesting," said Emmie, her red lips quivering like a frightened child's now that she had spoken, and the reaction to shamefacedness was coming upon her.

"Very interesting if one were allowed to hear these same *pros* and *cons* which seem to be all duties and to have nothing to say to inclination," answered Wynyard, with a glance of tender admiration at Emmie's shy face, a glance which caused Katherine to recall her champion of the tumultuous meeting of a few months ago.

"I know the sort of talk ; I could tell you all about it, if you'd listen to me," struck in Casabianca disdainfully. "Rubbish about whether this pair of gloves would do to wear again of an evening, or whether that pocket-handkerchief was fine enough ! Now I'll tell you something. One day last year Emmie went to dine at Uncle Rivers's and came back with her eyes red with crying—and shall I tell you why—just because, as she was setting out, I picked her pocket of her handkerchief, and slipped in

mine instead, a jolly spotted cotton that had nothing much the matter with it except that it was not useless enough for idiots. Emmie dropped it under the table at dinner-time without knowing it was not her own, and a fool of a footman brought it to her into the drawing-room afterwards, spread out upon a big silver tray. Now need she have cried about such a thing as that?"

"I did not at the time so that anyone could see me," pleaded Emmie; "but the room was full of strangers, and Aunt Rivers looked at me and at it. You know the sort of look, don't you, Mr. Anstice? And you would have felt rather queer, with the footman standing straight upright before you, now would not you, if you had been me and had been there?"

"Very queer indeed, like knocking the fellow down if I had been myself and had been there, I'm afraid," said Wynyard hotly, picturing to himself the insolent wooden stare with which Lady Rivers's flunky would perform the feat described, and those lovely wistful eyes of Emmie's falling under it. "However" (recovering himself), "I should in that case have been the greatest idiot there. You need not have vexed yourself. I can testify to there having been schoolboy tricks played in your aunt's drawing-room enough to make her recognise Casabianca's

handiwork in that one. She understood all about it, you may be sure."

Emmie shook her head. "She *was* ashamed of me all the same; one knows well enough when one's relations are feeling ashamed of one, and I can tell you it is not a pleasant sensation."

"Certainly not, whether it comes from relations or old friends," said Wynyard, lowering his voice; "you know I have had my share of snubs from the quarter you mention before this. It is not exactly pleasant, but it puts one on one's metal. Shall we make a league together? If you take courage to brave another encounter with Jeames's silver tray—for, mind you, I can't believe that anyone else in that house would be ashamed of you if you were dressed in spotted cotton handkerchiefs from head to foot—I will risk the cold shoulder from the higher powers and, welcome or not welcome, come from time to time to inquire how you are getting on, and to compare notes on our grievances. May I?"

He rose to take his leave as he finished speaking, and Mildie, dreading to lose her chance of picking up useful information, struck into the conversation in her shrill schoolgirl voice, and saved Emmie the embarrassment of answering.

"I think there ought to be sumptuary laws like those

in Venice during the middle ages. Mr. Anstice, don't you think it would be a good plan for us to have sumptuary laws, to keep rich people from spending their money on footmen and ridiculous lace pocket-handkerchiefs and silver trays that only lock up the specie of the country? It seems to me that sumptuary laws are wanted, and I wish I understood why they did not answer when they were tried in Venice. Do you know, Mr. Anstice?"

Wynyard contrived to escape committing himself on either the historical or the economical problem; and, after a little playful bantering of Mildie on the subject of her indefatigable industry, he took leave, turning back however at the door to ask when Emmie's visit to Eccleston Square would begin. This week or next?

Emmie answered as if it was now a settled matter that the visit should be paid, rather to the surprise of Katherine Moore, who could not perceive that anything had been said during the talk round the fire to set her scruples at rest or throw any fresh light on the subject.

Mrs. West was a good deal troubled when the time came for packing up her daughter's wardrobe in preparation for the visit. She held up garments to the light with many rueful shakes of the head, and stood irresolute for a quarter of an hour at a time with the emergency purse in her hand, anxiously balancing its slenderness

against the manifest deficiencies in shoes, gloves, and minor adornments (for the greater wants must not even be thought of) which a review of Eccleston Square dressing requirements made evident. Emmie took the purse out of her hand one day at last and shut it with a cheerful, resolute-sounding snap.

“Never mind, mamma,” she said, creeping close to her and laying cheek against cheek, her favourite form of caress. “I can bear it, and I will not have you spend one penny of the poor little bit of emergency money left now on me, for I know what it is to you, darling—heart’s blood; and since I can’t, like Katherine and Christabel, fill your purse for you, I won’t let you take anything out to spare my silliness. Besides, do you know, I think I am going to be *not* so silly. I believe I shall not mind now even if Alma does look surprised at the worn tips of my evening shoes when I show them by accident; or if Aunt Rivers says plainly that she thinks my hat and my jacket, and those dreadful green gloves that have not worn as well as they ought to have done for the half-crown you spent on them at Christmas, too shabby to wear on a drive with her in the carriage. Perhaps they will save me from having to call on Mrs. Kirkman, and that will be a good thing. Anyway, I have a warm feeling at my heart just now that makes me think I shall

almost like to be snubbed about my clothes, and that I can smile over the little sneers that used to make me feel so hot and ashamed. I don't know how it comes, but I believe it will last me all through the fortnight's visit."

"I know how it is, darling. It's just your love for your mother that keeps your heart too warm to feel the slights you choose to bear rather than add to her anxiety. I'm very grateful to you, my darling, for I know it is just that."

Emmie did not contradict her mother, but her fair smooth cheek glowed against the faded one that leaned towards it. She was not *quite* sure it *was* just that herself, yet what else could it be, and where was the use of talking? It was good for all parties that she should be setting forth on this important visit in an independent frame of mind, and there was no need to probe into its cause further.

END OF VOL. I.



UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA



3 0112 047687832